DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 287 RC 015 100

AUTHOR	McAfee, Oralie
TITLE	School-Home Communications: A Resource Book for Improving School-Home Relations.
INSTITUTION	Appalachia Educational Lab., Charleston, W. Va.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Oct 84
CONTRACT	400-83-0001
NOTE	308p.; Presented at a workshop sponsored by School-Family Relations Program, Appalachia Educational Laboratory (Charleston, WV, October 15-17, 1984).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC13 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Communication (Thought Transfer); Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; Faculty Development; *Family School Relationship; *Improvement Programs; *Inservice Teacher Education; Listening Skills; Literature Reviews; *Management Development; Needs Assessment; Parent School Relationship; *Parent Student Relationship; Parent Teacher Conferences; Questionnaires; Resource Materials; Rural Urban Differences; Specialists; Speech Communication; Telephone Usage Instruction; Workshops; Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS	Appalachia Educational Laboratory WV; Examples

ABSTRACT

Presented in this resource notebook are some of the basic ingredients of how to improve communications from school to home, including current research and the best thinking on staff development and inservice training, examples of techniques to foster better home-school relations through better communication, and ways to train school personnel in using those techniques. Following an introductory section, eight sections address the topic beginning with "School and Family: The Essential Connection," followed by "Staff Development: Research and Recommendations," "Guides for Effective Home-School Relations and Communications," and "Especially for Administrators and Policy-Makers." Section 6, "Especially for Teachers and Specialists," has seven subsections addressing what is known about school-family relations, using non-technical language, listening fully, utilizing the telephone and recorded messages, examining the written word and other symbols, developing academic guidance sheets, and holding parent-teacher conferences. Sections 7 and 8, entitled respectively "Especially for Support and Service Personnel" and "Especially for Families," are followed by a ninth section concerning "Evaluation: Formative, Summative, and Points in Between." Readings, exercises, and reference lists accompany the sections. The tenth and final section is comprised of nine appendices including additional references, telephone interviewing questions, a summary of the needs assessment process, handouts, parent-staff-conference questionnaires, and guidelines for conducting Nominal Group Technique meetings. (BRR)

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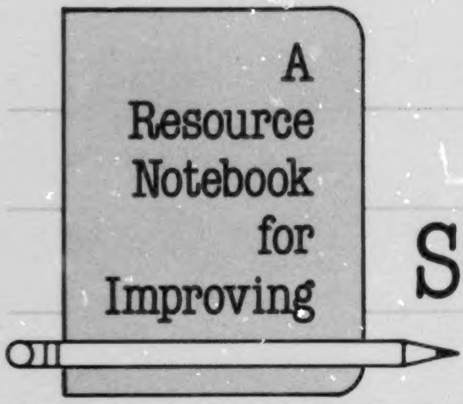

A Resource Notebook for Improving SCHOOL-HOME COMMUNICATIONS

by-
Dr. Oralie McAfee

Center for Education
Metropolitan State College
Denver, Colorado

Presented at a workshop sponsored by-
School-Family Relations Program
Appalachia Educational Laboratory

October 15-17, 1984
Holiday Inn Civic Center
Charleston, West Virginia

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About AEL's School-Family Relations Program

The School-Family Relations Program of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) was started in September 1981 following an extended period of planning. It grew out of a major regional needs assessment in 1980, which drew attention to two clusters of concerns: (1) interactive issues regarding how to improve the ways that schools and families relate to one another, and (2) a focus on ways that schools might assist particular groups of families whose children are, on the average, "at risk" academically. In a special sense, the School-Family Relations Program also grew out of prior AEL work performed under the Childhood and Parenting Research Program (FY 80-82). This previous work provided a network of field contacts, two data bases that could be further analyzed, and relevant methodology and research experience.

From the beginning, the School-Family Relations Program has engaged in action research as its main strategy for studying and effecting changes in school practices. The Program's purpose is to identify, develop, and encourage implementation of effective home-school relations practices in schools within the Appalachian Region. During 1983 and 1984 this work is being carried out through three project foci:

(1) finding effective ways that schools can relate to "special needs" families (e.g., isolated rural, minority, single parent, two-job families, etc.);

(2) improving communications between schools and homes regarding student behavior, attendance, and academic progress, particularly at the secondary level; and

(3) preparing school personnel for working with families.

This workshop constitutes a major dissemination activity for the School-Family Relations Program, which concludes its National Institute of Education-sponsored research effort in 1984.

Acknowledgements

The initial collection of information for this Resource Notebook was begun by former staff member, Ms. Alice M. Spriggs. In preparing this Resource Notebook, Dr. Oralie McAfee undertook the job of pulling together all data and preparing the manuscript in its present form. We are grateful to Dr. McAfee for the long hours and dedication it took to complete this task. Without her effort, there would be no Resource Notebook.

Special thanks to the following AEL staff who worked diligently typing, editing, and proofing the manuscript for the Resource Notebook: Carolyn Reynolds, Mary Farley, and Beth Sattes. For technical advice on school-family research, thanks to Ed Gotts and Beth Sattes. For coordinating the workshop arrangements, thanks to Berma Lanham.

Again, thanks to all of you for a useful product produced under a tight deadline.

Sandra R. Orletsky, Director
School-Family Relations Program

Improving School-Home Communications Workshop: Using A Resource Notebook to Train Teachers and Staff

(A Workshop for School Personnel in the Appalachian Region)

Staff Development Personnel: October 15, 16, 17, 1984

Teachers and Specialists: October 16, 17, 1984

Agenda

Monday, October 15, 1984

10:30 - 12:00	Registration for Staff Development Personnel--Holiday Inn Lobby
12:00 - 1:30	Opening Activities--Holiday Inn Dining Room LUNCH--Together
1:45 - 2:15	Explanation and Overview, Phase I--Holiday Inn Room 619
2:15 - 5:00	Staff Development in School-Family Relations and Communications: Research and Recommendations
(3:25)	REFRESHMENTS
5:30 - 7:30	DINNER--Together--Fifth Quarter
7:30 - 9:30	"Hands-On" Planning and Preparation--Holiday Inn, Room 619

Tuesday, October 16, 1984

7:15 - 8:00	BREAKFAST--Holiday Inn Dining Room
8:00 - 8:30	To Do Today--Holiday Inn, Rooms 119 and 619*
8:30 - 11:00	Decision-Making, Planning and Preparation of Staff Development Activities for Teachers and Specialists
(9:00)	REFRESHMENTS
11:00 - 11:30	Reflection and a Look Ahead to Phase II
10:30 - 12:00	Registration for Teachers and Specialists--Holiday Inn Lobby

*For October 16-17: ALL participants in elementary group will meet in Room 119; all participants in secondary group will meet in Room 619.

12:00 - 1:30	Opening Activities (Staff Development Personnel, Teachers and Specialists, AEL Workshop Staff)—Holiday Inn Dining Room
	LUNCH--Together
1:45 - 2:15	Explanation and Overview, Phase II--Holiday Inn Room 119 and 619
2:30 - 3:30	School-Family Communications: Research and Recommendations Holiday Inn, Room 119 and 619
(3:00)	REFRESHMENTS
3:30 - 5:00	School-Family Communications: Plain Talk and Fancy Listening--Holiday Inn, Room 119 and 619
5:30 - 7:00	DINNER—Together—Fifth Quarter
7:30 - 9:00	Shared Expertise--Holiday Inn, Room 119 and 619

Wednesday, October 17, 1984

7:15 - 8:00	BREAKFAST--Holiday Inn Dining Room
8:00 - 8:15	Opening Activities--Holiday Inn, Room 119 and 619
8:15 - 10:30	Spoken and Written Communications: Forms and Functions
10:30 - 11:00	Refreshments, Reimbursement Forms, and Other Essentials
11:00 - 12:15	School and Individual Action and Follow-Up Plans
12:15 - 12:30	Reflection and a Look Ahead to Phase III
12:30	Adjournment

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Section I

About This Resource Notebook

When convenience foods such as cake and muffin mixes were first marketed, many contained everything except water, which the cook was to add. Some of these box mixes did not sell too well until one astute student of human nature sensed that too much had been done for the cook--it seemed that creativity, a sense of pride, and varying things to suit the occasion could not be achieved by simply adding water and stirring. It all seemed too simple and made the cook feel unneeded.

So now we are invited to add "two fresh eggs" or "extra oil for extra richness," "grated orange peel," or some other personal touch that makes the product suit our tastes, the situation--and allows us to exercise our own considerable creativity. The result: almost no one bakes "from scratch"!

So it is with this Resource Notebook for Staff Development in School-Family Relations. We have put together in one notebook some of the basic ingredients of school-family relations, particularly for the states of the Appalachian Region; current research and best thinking on staff development and inservice training; examples of techniques to foster better home-school relations through better communication; and ways to train school personnel in using those techniques. We have also provided ways for users to add their own "fresh egg," "chopped walnuts," or "extra chocolate"--personal, local, state, or other ideas and suggestions. We did it this way for several reasons:

1. We are convinced that school people at the local level, including the building level, do not need a pre-packaged prescriptive approach to staff development. Rather, they need resources, ideas, and organizational help to develop inservice experiences in ways that meet their own identified needs.

2. There are too many good ideas for encouraging better school-home relations for any one notebook, and more are coming out all the time. We've left space for you to add those that look promising.

3. As more research and information on school-family relations and communications, and on effective staff development becomes available--and it will--you can add it to the appropriate sections.

4. The information we have compiled is limited to one aspect of school-family relations: improving communications from the school to the home. There are other aspects equally compelling: improving communication from the home to the school, as well as completely different forms of parent involvement. You may wish to add sections pertaining to other techniques of working with parents and the community.

How to Use This Notebook

We are assuming that a person or committee responsible for staff development in a school district or school building would take the lead in using this material. The following approach will probably be most productive.

- Study the background and information sections:

  Section II--School and Family: The Essential Connection

  Section III--Staff Development: Research and Recommendations

  Section IV--Guides for Effective School-Family Relations and Communications

  Section IX--Evaluation

- Quickly scan the resource sections, so that you have a general idea of what they contain (Sections V-VIII).

- Conduct a need and interest assessment using the suggestions that are given in Section III. With this information as a guide, you can develop objectives, then select activities from the appropriate sections or other resources to help achieve those objectives. Plan and carry out the inservice activities according to the guidelines, modifying and supplementing our activities and suggestions as appropriate. Remember to evaluate and followup! Make notes about the way you used the various activities and the results, so you'll have that information to guide you another time.

As a teacher, or administrator, or other school staff member who is to improve your own skills in communicating with families, you'll want to read the background and information section, then examine your situation and yourself to see what aspects of school-family relations you would like to improve. Perhaps you are uncomfortable talking with parents about problems; maybe you tend to overwhelm them with "educator talk" without really listening to what they have to say. If so, turn to the activities on "Listen With Your Mind and Heart" and "Plain Words" for some ideas and practice activities. Perhaps you'd like to start a class calendar, so that parents will know what their children are studying and can do things to help at home. You can find suggestions for getting that form of communication going in "The Written Word."

Whether you are using the Notebook for group work in staff development or for yourself as an individual, you will find many additional resources in the last section. If activities to meet your needs are not in the Notebook, try some of the other resources that are suggested. Many of the national organizations will send catalogs and sample copies of their material on request. Your state education agency or nearby college are other good resources.

Schools alone cannot educate children. School personnel will find in this Resource Notebook ways to achieve better school-family communications at the classroom, school building, and district levels.

Section II

School and Family: The Essential Connection

Home-School Relations

When school-age children are involved, schools and families are inevitably linked. Sometimes they blame each other for any problems; sometimes they support each other; sometimes they uneasily co-exist. But whatever their relationship, the youngster who links them is probably influenced by it. Whatever their relationship, both schools and families are influenced. Whatever their relationship, the larger society, which has a stake in the success of both schools and families, is influenced and concerned.

For many years, the Appalachia Educational Laboratory has been studying the unique needs of Appalachian schools and families in maintaining and improving school-family relationships. From our own work, and from other studies throughout the United States, consistent findings emerge. Parent involvement in schools is significantly related to:

- improved student academic achievement,
- improved student attendance in school,
- improved student behavior in school, and
- increased community support for schools, including human, financial, and materials resources (Barth, 1979; Bittle, 1975; Boger, 1978; Comer, 1980; Duncan, 1969; Edlund, 1969; Fairchild, 1976; Gillum, Schooley & Novak, 1977; Ingram, 1978; Henderson, 1982; Hofmeister, 1977; Karracker, 1972; McKinney, 1975; Mize, 1977; Parker & McCoy, 1977; Shelton & Dobson, 1973; Sheats Sheats & Dunkleberger, 1979; Smith & Brahce, 1963; Trovato & Bucher, 1980).

We also know that parents think their children's education is important. They want to be kept informed of their child's progress in school and to be involved in their child's education (Etheridge, Collins & Coats, 1979; Gallup, 1980; Gotts, 1983; Hubbell, 1979; Valentin & Alston, 1978; Williams, 1984).

Parent involvement is a catch-all term that is used to describe a wide variety of activities that range from occasional attendance at school functions to intensive efforts to help parents become better teachers of their own children. We don't yet know all about what type of "involvement" works best with different kinds of schools, communities, teachers, families, and children. For example, information on appropriate activities for families and schools with upper elementary and secondary school pupils is just beginning to become available (Gotts & Purnell, 1984).

However, quality communication between the school and home is present in successful parent involvement. Of value in and of itself, it is also a basic precondition supporting other types of parent involvement, such as teaching children at home, volunteering in the school, or supporting the school's educational efforts.

Let's look at some of the reasons school-family communication, as an essential element in productive school-family relations, needs to be given special attention: the changing relationship between the school and the family; the change in structure of many families; social and demographic change; and the increase in educational expectations for all pupils.

Change in relationship between the school and the family. There was a time when schools, families, the community, and other community institutions all worked together more, each fairly sure of what its own and the others' roles and responsibilities were, and each generally supportive of the other.

Probably the best example was a rule that many families had: "If you get a lickin' at school, you get another at home--no questions asked." School "lickin's" are long gone, and so is the unquestioning relationship between school and home. Many parents and most of society feel free to question, challenge, and make their views known to schools as well as other institutions (Naisbitt, 1982). At the same time, they are expecting more of schools, not less (Goodlad, 1984). Many are better educated and more sophisticated than educators perceive them to be (Williams, 1984). They are looking for interactions with schools; not for the expectation that they will give unquestioning deference.

As part of this changed and changing relationship, schools all over the United States have established parent advisory councils, state legislatures have established "accountability" laws, grassroots and national citizen action committees have organized to influence school policy and practices, and individual parents have challenged school actions (Naisbitt, 1982).

Change in structure of many families. As expectations of schools by families are influenced by larger trends, so are the abilities of families to respond to the school's expectations of them. Today's families have changed and continue to change. Both parents may work out of the home; single parents--of either sex--are rearing children; many fathers want a more active role in child-rearing; remarriage often creates a new and different family structure; and cultural and social diversity is no longer "strange."

Many parents are having their first child between 30 and 35; others are having children quite young. These two groups may have very different abilities and desires in relation to schools and their children's school work. Families are having fewer children, and those children are more likely to have been in preschool or child-care away from home before they started to school and before- and after-school care. Although evidence is strong that the predicted adverse effects of such family changes on children's development have not come true, these changes call for a rethinking of traditional means of school-home communications. For example, afternoon parent-teacher conferences may be unattended because of the parent(s) employment. Reaching parents by telephone during the day may be almost impossible except for an emergency. Seeing a parent as he or she brings the youngster to school may not be possible, as the child may arrive from a child care center. Other forms of communication may be needed.

Social and demographic change. Perhaps the most obvious social change impacting a need for good school-family-community relations is the "graying" of America. The proportion of people with children in school continues to shrink. It is projected to be less than 20 percent by 1985. Schools and families must work together with the larger community to provide the tax base essential for good schools for children, parents, teachers, and our entire society. Schools and communities can work together to create an "educative community" using school and non-school resources for education. Older people, businesses, the arts--and yes, even television and technology--are some of the elements of an "ecology of educating institutions" (Goodlad, 1984).

Other less obvious changes require school-family cooperation to make sure children's progress in school is not negatively affected: the pervasive influence of television, the power of the peer group on children's behavior, and the large number of secondary school students who have paying jobs (Goodlad, 1984). Assigning homework does little good if television or a job takes up the time that might have been spent in homework. Telling parents to have their teenager study does little good if the parent is ignored. Schools do not function apart from the larger society; they are a part of societal changes, both influencing and being influenced by them.

Increases in educational expectations for all pupils. Educational changes, both influencing and being influenced by them.

Increases in educational expectations for all pupils. Educational expectations for all pupils are increasing. Many states have instituted or are considering competency tests for students. Some colleges are increasing their entrance requirements in an effort to influence high school requirements. Schools and children alone cannot meet those expectations; families must help. A few examples will make the point clear.

Families can help children attend school regularly and on time. They can assure that children have the adequate rest, exercise, and nutrition so essential to learning. They can show children they value studying and learning by making reading, study material, and a place and time to study available. Families can help and encourage youngsters who are faltering; stimulate and challenge those who need more than the school can provide.

Some families provide this support naturally. It is in the child's best interest for schools to do what they can to help and encourage all families to do likewise. When expectations are either too high or too low for a given child, families must be involved in setting realistic expectations. At the secondary level, more stringent college entrance requirements indicate that families must be involved in course and career choices.

In many communities, school-home relations and the communications that enhance those relations are satisfying to both school and parents (Goodlad, 1984; Gotts, 1983). In many others, they could be improved. In all schools, the relationships between home and school should be monitored and evaluated as an important part of the basic task of operating schools and educating children.

Preparing Teachers and Other School Personnel to Work with Families

Few teachers, administrators, and other school personnel receive formal training in school-family relations or any type of parent involvement. In a survey conducted in both rural and urban areas in the Appalachian Region by AEL (Spriggs, 1983), only 37 percent of the professional personnel had received such training in their undergraduate work, and only 24 percent had received training in graduate work.

Service and support personnel (school secretaries, custodians, clerical and classroom aides, and food service workers) interact frequently with parents about discipline, school work, school activities, and lunches. They, too, have received little formal training in interacting with parents. Inservice training, when provided to support staff, usually deals closely with their work-related activities, not with how they interact with parents.

Lack of formal training does not, of course, indicate that teachers, administrators, specialists, or support staff are without any of the necessary skills. Teachers do not feel reluctant to deal with parents. They report they have learned to work with families through experiences other than formal training: through being a member of a family, church work, volunteer work, and other informal situations. Good human relation skills, however learned, are basic to communication with parents or anyone else. Less than 20 percent of the teachers said they were unprepared for working with parents, but also less than 50 percent said they were adequately prepared.

In addition, 40 percent of the certified personnel and 35 percent of service and support personnel said they would like assistance in interacting with families. Training in school-family relations and working with parents is something many school people need and are interested in. More specifically, they asked for help in dealing with parents on discipline issues, grades, attendance, and working with parents in general.

This need for more training of administrators, teachers, and other school personnel in working effectively with parents has been confirmed by other studies (Williams, 1984).

Recognizing Local Variation and Need

Education in the United States is made up of individual classrooms, buildings, and districts, each with their own unique strengths and needs. This is as true in school-family relations and communication as it is in the provision of science facilities, amount of time and resources allotted to the arts, or any other aspect of schooling. Although there are many attitudes and skills in working with parents and the home that all school personnel share, there will be differences, too. In-depth analyses of some of these differences are available in AEL's technical reports, and will only be summarized here.

Elementary schools involve families in different ways than secondary schools. This is an appropriate reaction to age and developmental differences in children and families, and to the differences in curriculum and school organization at these levels. Little guidance about school-family relations has been available to secondary school personnel, since most research and development work has been in preschool and primary schools. However, parents of secondary school children still want to be involved and informed about school activities in general and about any problems relating to their own children (Purnell & Gotts, 1983). Practices that are effective in elementary schools may not work well in secondary schools as the nature of parents' involvement with their children changes. This does not mean that they are any less involved or interested. The attendance at any high school sports or drama performance is evidence of that!

Urban schools and families may relate to each other in different ways than do rural schools and families. Schools in small towns may have slightly different interactions than either rural or urban communities. Although research evidence on these differences is sparse and based on parent and teacher perceptions, what there is suggests that rural and small town schools are more central to the lives of families than urban schools; teachers in small towns were more likely to interact with parents around school activities than teachers in either rural or urban areas. There appears to be more informal communication between home and school in rural communities and more formal communication in urban communities; rural parents have more confidence than urban parents that when children have problems in school, collaborative efforts will produce the desired results (Gotts & Purnell, 1984).

Teachers report some interesting differences in the way rural and urban families relate to schools. Rural teachers report that parents seem uneasy about coming to the school and are likely to come only when there is a problem. Teachers in small towns and urban areas reported this much less often. In urban areas, teachers report more interaction about discipline, grades, and attendance than do teachers in rural areas. Teachers in urban areas also requested help in working with families on discipline (Gotts & Purnell, 1984).

Although urban, small town, and rural school-family relations are similar in many respects, school personnel should be sensitive to the variations. School personnel who are working in the same type of community in which they lived and went to school, may intuitively respond to these differences. If they work in schools in a different type of community than where they grew up, they may need help in understanding and responding appropriately to the different communication patterns and needs.

Likewise, if families move from one setting to another--an increasing possibility in our mobile society--schools may need to explain the differences before real misunderstandings occur.

Communities and schools that already have effective and productive home-school relations have a different task than those where relations are distant and strained. Maintenance of trust and communication requires constant attention, but rebuilding is infinitely more difficult. Little is known about these differences in "climate" and their influence on school-family relations, but no one connected with schools or familiar with current thinking about effective schools can doubt that such differences exist (Goodlad, 1984).

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Section III

Staff Development: Research and Recommendations

Whether you call it staff development, professional development, professional renewal, or just inservice education, continuing education of school personnel is essential. This is as true in school-family relations as in curriculum content or instructional methods. Maybe more so. Most teachers and administrators in the Appalachian Region received no specific training for working with parents and the home in their preservice training, yet they realized that school-family interaction is either desirable (24%) or essential (74%) in order to do the best job of helping pupils learn (Spriggs, 1984). From a different perspective, parents welcome teachers' ideas and guidance, and consider teachers who communicate frequently with parents to be the better teachers, higher in interpersonal skills and overall quality (Becker & Epstein, 1981).

In this section, we will look at what we know about staff development and adult education as it pertains to school-family relations, then suggest an approach to planning, developing, and evaluating staff development.

To keep the information concise enough to be of use to busy school personnel, we have distilled research and recommendations from a wide variety of sources, and have not elaborated on any of them. Use the listing of references at the end of this section and resources in the appendix for further study of the concepts and ideas.

What We Know

Local and state education agencies, colleges and universities, teachers' associations, professional organizations, and businesses that deal with schools have made staff development and inservice education one of the few growth areas in education in the last decade. The reasons for this development include demographic trends among teachers and administrators; a decrease in traditional sources of new ideas and professional development; social, economic, and organizational changes; decentralization of responsibility for staff development; increased information on adults as learners; expectations that people will keep up to date; and recognition of the importance of employee morale and commitment.

Demographic trends among teachers and administrators. "Fewer new teachers are entering the profession; turnover among teachers has been reduced. There is less mobility. The average age of teachers and their level of experience is increasing" (Ohio Department of Education, 1983, p. 16). Continuing education for current staff is essential if they are to keep current, enthusiastic, and effective.

Decrease in traditional sources of new ideas and professional development. Beginning teachers often brought fresh ideas into a school, but their numbers are diminishing. Many teachers and administrators have already completed their graduate degrees or enough education to be at the "top of the scale," and don't want more formal education. Local affiliate groups of professional organizations, who often provided workshops and conferences directly related to teachers' needs and interests, are often struggling for existence rather than providing dynamic leadership. Schools and school districts are providing inservice education to replace these former sources.

Social, economic, and organizational changes. As a result of social, economic, and school organizational changes, schools are being expected to do things that teachers and administrators had little or no preparation for.

Inservice education has been essential to help schools in "mainstreaming" of handicapped children; bilingual education and English as a second language; multicultural education; differentiated staffing, especially team teaching and working with paraprofessionals; the introduction of microcomputers and other instructional technology; instructional concepts such as "mastery learning" and "time-on-task"; the press for "effective schools"; and, of course, parent involvement.

Decentralization of responsibility for staff development. Emphasis on the building unit, rather than the central office as the most effective unit for improvement and change, and on having building teachers and principals design staff development programs to meet their own needs is changing the way inservice education is conceived of and delivered.

Increased information on adults as learners. As more adults, including school personnel, have become involved in continuing education, adults as learners have been studied in-depth, with many provocative ideas for consideration in staff development. These findings are discussed in the next part of this section.

Expectations that people in an organization will "keep up to date." The "information explosion" in all professional and technical areas has made continuing education in all organizations essential. Schools and school personnel are no exception.

Management and organization theory that recognizes the importance of employee morale and commitment. Staff development and professional renewal, properly done, are recognized as important sources of motivation and high morale--even inspiration. By honing skills and broadening professional ideas, inservice helps teachers feel secure, confident, and more satisfied on the job. In addition, inservice activities supported by board policy and administrative commitment demonstrate that these groups care about and support what teachers do (Brodinsky, 1983).

Adults as Learners: Guiding Principles

Research on how people learn, develop, and change has given us many insights on adult learning. Some of the more significant findings, particularly as they relate to school settings, inservice education, and school-family relations are:

- Adults--even teachers with the same number of years of college and teaching--have a wide range of previous experience, knowledge, skills, interest, self-direction, learning styles and cognitive levels. A few will be able to think abstractly, deal easily with theories, and see the relationship of broad generalizations to their specific situation. Many will be much more concrete in their thinking and conceptual style. They will need many examples, demonstrations, practice, and careful development of generalizations before they can understand and apply them to other situations. In addition, individual differences among people increase with age. As a result, adult education must provide for differences of all kinds (Knowles, 1978).

- Adults who can deal easily with abstract ideas in their own areas of expertise will not necessarily be able to do so as they begin to learn something new. For example, a top-notch teacher of a difficult, abstract subject may have to start at a very basic skill level in dealing productively and positively with parents.

- Many adults prefer informal learning strategies with opportunity for interaction with other learners. Examples of such informal strategies might be sharing information on "what works best for me," or methods that call for team or group learning rather than an individualized competitive approach. Even lectures, films, or demonstrations may be more effective when followed by group discussion, practice, or critiquing each other's trial applications.

- Adult learning is enhanced by educational approaches that demonstrate respect, trust, and concern for the learner. Both personal and professional growth and competence must be considered (Holly, 1983). Adults will resist learning situations which they believe are an attack on their competence. Knowles (1978) suggests that the teacher of adults should engage in mutual inquiry and learning with the learners, rather than simply transmitting knowledge or monitoring skill acquisition.

- Adults need to be self-directing (Knowles, 1978). They want to learn things that are important and useful to them. These needs and interests should be the starting point for planning and organizing learning activities.

- Life situations, both personal and professional, should provide the organizing ideas for adult learning--not subject matter (Knowles, 1978). Likewise, analysis of their own life experiences can be a powerful teaching/learning technique for adults.

- Acquiring a new skill, technique, or attitude can be quite threatening to adults who already have something that "works." They may need much assurance and support as they get "worse" (try out new skills) in an effort to get better (Joyce & Showers, 1983). They need to see the results of their efforts and have accurate, yet supportive, information about their progress.

- Adults who are learning a new skill in a context other than the one in which they will apply it should be taught the problems of "transfer," and that the greater the ambiguity of application situation (as with teaching) the greater the problem of transfer (Joyce & Showers, 1983).

Staff Development: Guiding Principles

Almost anyone connected with a school can tell you what's wrong with inservice training as it has usually been conducted. They'll mention such things as "too theoretical," "no follow-up," "at 4:00 in the afternoon, who cares?" or "Well, that's all very nice, but what does it have to do with what I do on Monday?" Researchers have identified broader concerns, such as the lack of time and money most schools have for staff development; the need for coherent and comprehensive need-based programs, rather than "one-shot" workshops; lack of coordination and leadership, especially at the individual school level; limited diversity in how, when, and where inservice is provided; inadequate definition of goals and objectives; and lack of evaluation. From the viewpoint of our current concern--school-family relations--we could also add that most inservice appears to be focused on classroom instruction or the latest idea making the rounds (stress management, time management, or a particular discipline technique). Very little appears to be done in helping teachers communicate and work with parents.

In spite of its problems, inservice education and professional development are supported by school personnel, especially if staff development is the right kind (Brodinsky, 1983; Howey & Carrigan, 1980).

So what is the "right kind?" Are there magic ingredients that will make staff development effective, interesting, and above all, result in better learning for children? Well, no, of course not. What is available are some basic principles and guidelines, some based on research, some based on recommendations and experience of respected practitioners and theorists, and some based on theories of planning and change. Some pertain to the institution--the school and school district; some pertain to how to motivate participants; some pertain to content and instructional methods; and some to time and facilities. The planning process that seems to be most promising is covered in the next portion.

Principles Relating to Institutional Policies and Commitment:

- Staff development activities should be based on school board policies which all segments of the educational community can support.

- A financial commitment in the form of money, time, space, and personnel should be made for staff development. Even a small allocation of money and designation of responsibility is better than none. If possible, this should include incentives for teachers, although those incentives do not have to be money. Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards can complement each other.

- Although the trend in staff development is toward the building unit as the base, district-wide needs should also be considered. School personnel will accept and support both.

- Planning and implementing effective staff development should be a shared responsibility. Administrators, central office personnel, or staff development specialists can't do it all. Teachers and other school personnel want their say. But involving and listening to teachers doesn't mean dumping the job in their laps. Successful programs are jointly planned and delivered.

Planning and Organization:

- Staff development should have an overall plan, both for the school and the individual. Fragmentation and duplication waste time, effort, and energy. Better to focus on a few agreed upon goals than to have a smattering of offerings which don't add up to any clear and complete program.

- Activities that are on-going, cumulative, and part of a school's total program are more effective than those which occur sporadically. Short sessions held once a week, each one complementing and building upon the previous ones, would usually be more effective than a day-long session twice a year.

- Follow-up is essential to help teachers transfer the learning to their own classroom and situations.

Delivery:

- School-based programs are often preferred to those delivered "out-of-context," although visiting other schools and attending professional conferences can also be effective learning experiences.

- Forming teachers into groups who can support, critique, and energize each other will help create a social climate that is essential to the effective delivery of inservice training.

- A place for teachers to study, learn, and work together helps create a "learning" climate. With many schools less crowded than they once were, such a place for professional development might be housed in each school.

Content and Methods:

- Content should be as close as possible to school personnel's everyday needs and concerns. Thus, a general presentation on the need for better school-home communication is less likely to have an impact than more specific content that provides teachers the skills and resources to achieve such communication.

- However, theory and practice are two sides to the same coin, and one can frequently illuminate the other. Knowing why you do something, and how it relates to other things you do gives them all meaning and significance. For example, teachers who regard efforts to increase school-home communications as simply "one more thing I'm expected to do," may have a different attitude when they understand the benefits to all concerned.

- Content and methods should work together to help learners attain what some researchers call "executive control" (Joyce & Showers, 1983). All school personnel work in relatively ambiguous situations, where the unexpected is expected and much judgment is required. School personnel need to understand the purposes of what they are doing, how to adapt and modify, when to use one approach and when to use another, and how to think conceptually about what they are doing.

- Content and methods must work together toward achievement of objectives that are clearly stated and known by the participants.

- A wide variety of methods are available and should be used to maintain interest and increase effectiveness. Combinations of methods are frequently more effective than any one alone, as shown in the following chart.

TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS: THE DEGREE OF PROFICIENCY ATTAINED IN KNOWLEDGE, SKILL AND APPLICATION DETERMINED BY THE FIVE STEPS OF THE TRAINING DESIGN

		THE TRAINING STAGES		
PERCENT OF IMPLEMENTATION	TRAINING STEPS	Knowledge Mastery	Skill Acquisition	Classroom Application
5-10%	THEORY	Middle to high	low	very low
10-15%	Theory Plus DEMONSTRATIONS	high	low to middle	very low
20+%	Theory, demonstrations, plus PRACTICE and FEEDBACK	high	high	very low
	Theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, CURRICULUM ADAPTATION	high	high	low to middle
80-90%	Theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, curriculum adaptation, plus COACHING	high	high	high
	All of the above with PERIODIC REVIEW	high	high	high

Note: the degree of proficiency attained as indicated by LOW, MIDDLE, or HIGH
(From Staff Development Research by Dr. Bruce Joyce, Director, Booksend Laboratories, Palo Alto, California)

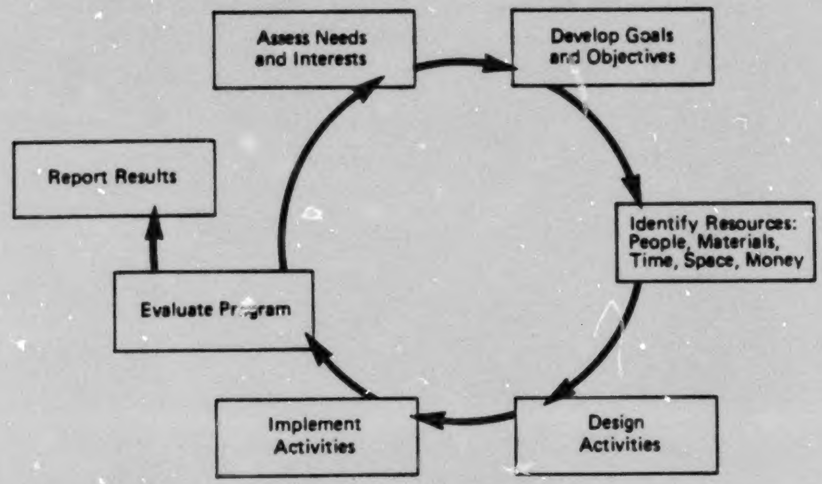
- Lectures, films, audio and video tapes, demonstrations, simulations, brainstorming, discussions, role-taking and role-playing, instructional games, practice, small-group work on a specific problem, "coaching," group process techniques such as Nominal Group Technique, development of materials to implement the ideas under consideration, "hands-on" experience, guided reflection, visitations, self-guided instruction, computer assisted instruction, and conversations are all appropriate. The list of possible methods of teaching and learning goes on and on, and variations on the basic techniques are developed rapidly. There is no reason for staff development to get into the "presentation followed by discussion" rut.

- Difficulties inherent in putting any new learning into practice should be dealt with "up front." Teach everyone involved about the problem of transferring what they have learned into real life settings and the discomfort they may experience (Joyce & Showers, 1983). If possible, people should develop a high degree of skill prior to trying out the idea in their work. If the new procedures are likely to require more teacher time than the ones they are replacing, teachers and administrators should be told. For example, it is immediately obvious that increasing the number, variety, and quality of communications from school to home will require more time of someone. Better be honest about it from the beginning.

A Process for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Successful Staff Development Programs

Planners of many kinds of programs in many situations have successfully used the planning process that we and others recommend for developing effective inservice training. Teachers use this model, with variations, when they preassess children's knowledge, then develop objectives, plan and implement activities, then evaluate children's learning and the activities. States and counties sometimes use this approach when they are contemplating a new service or a change in service. It does take more time and thought than simply securing a good speaker on parent involvement or communication skills, but the results are likely to be better.

The process is shown in the figure below:


Assess Needs and Interests
Develop Goals and Objectives
Identify Resources: People, Materials, Time, Space, Money
Design Activities
Implement Activities
Evaluate Program
Report Results

Although the process looks like it proceeds in an orderly, step-by-step fashion, in actual practice it does not. For example, when a planning committee begins to identify available resources, such as time and money available for inservice, they may have to go back to the drawing boards and revise or select only one or two out of several equally important goals and objectives. They cannot do all the things that need to be done. Or for instance, as a group begins a year-long inservice plan that calls for teachers to observe and coach other teachers, informal evaluation may call for a mid-year correction. The plan was taking far more time than anyone anticipated, and teachers simply could not do it on top of their other responsibilities. So the process is more flexible than it looks, and in actual practice there will be a lot of thinking ahead, backing up, revising, and redoing. Nonetheless, it is a very workable planning process.

Ideally, school board policy would stand behind and give direction to the entire process, but the process can be carried out even in the absence of a stated board policy, provided there is administrative support and approval. Carried out by whom? Ideally, by a planning committee representative of all affected groups, including parents. For example, parents should certainly be included in any school-home relations staff development process. However, if all groups cannot be represented, work with the people you have. We will briefly discuss each of the steps, using examples from school-home relations and communication.

Assess needs and interests. A comprehensive needs and interests assessment gets information from all affected groups, uses several ways of getting information, and tries to determine actual needs, as well as perceived needs and interests.

For example, parents of children of all ages should be given an opportunity to share their ideas on what aspects of school-home relations are satsifactory and which could be improved. School support and service personnel such as secretaries and custodians lend another perspective, and administrators and teachers still others.

Typically, a survey questionnaire, plus informal observation, is the information gathering tool. However, that approach should be supplemented (or even supplanted) by others. A short telephone interview that secretaries or volunteers can carry out will obtain reliable and usable information from parents (Gotts & Sattes, 1983). A copy of this interview is in Appendix C and may be reproduced and used.

Informal conversations with teachers can be systematically analyzed to determine perceived needs and interests. Techniques to help a group determine priorities, such as the Delphi or Nominal Group Technique, can quickly help a group set priorities, while making sure each member of the group has an equal voice (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975). Select those approaches that fit the group of people you are working with. There are others. The important thing is to use more than one approach.

Perceived needs and interests, especially of those people participating in the inservice training, are important to know and should be the starting point. What should be, or what is preferred, should also be determined. What is the ideal state of affairs? How often and in what ways should schools and families communicate? Once that is known, the discrepancy can be determined by observation and by objective data gathering (e.g., How many parent-teacher conferences are held? How many academic progress reports go home before reporting period? Is there a regular calendar or newsletter? A parents' bulletin board?). Perceived needs--that is, what administrators and other school personnel think they need--are probably not enough information.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory has developed material to help local groups identify such educational needs from a variety of perspectives, then work through a process that results in a plan for action (Shively, 1980). A summary of this process is in Appendix D. Additional material is available from AEL.

In planning a needs and interest assessment, don't ask about anything that it is unrealistic to provide training for. For example, a regular home visitor who works part-time in the classroom and visits each home part-time provides wonderful home-school communication and teaches parents how to help their children at home. However, such programs are exceedingly expensive and few districts can afford them. Be realistic, but not pessimistic! There are many things schools can do for very low cost.

Needs assessment can also determine useful information about when, where, and for how long participants would prefer the inservice, as well as suggestions for resources.

Share results with the school personnel, parents, and others involved to make sure the outcomes accurately reflect their concerns. This validation process can correct any miscommunications early.

Develop goals and objectives. After information from the needs assessment has been gathered, tabulated, analyzed and validated, the next step is to develop goals and objectives to meet the identified needs. For example, if a high priority need is better communication with parents about children's grades (and such a need was identified by teachers in the Appalachian Region), an appropriate goal might be: Teachers can explain grading standards and procedures in clear, non-technical language.

There might be several objectives to help reach that goal. A couple of samples are shown below:

> Working together, teachers will write non-technical explanations of standards and criteria used for each grading mark.
>
> Specialists, teachers, and administrators will orally explain to another person in non-technical language the meaning of certain commonly used grading and assessment terms (grade level, pecentile, mean, norm, and so forth.

Goals and objectives are seldom immediately obvious from the results of a needs assessment. Much study, some artistry and intuition, and a good knowledge of the area being considered are essential. It is a good idea to try out the goals and objectives on some of the people involved in the needs assessment because everything else, including evaluation, flows from the goals and objectives. Goals and objectives should be shared with participants in the staff development activities.

Identify resources: people, materials, time, space, and money. If the budget is tight, no need trying to locate the highest-priced outside consultant. Determine what you can do with what you have. If released time for staff development is a major problem, perhaps some faculty meeting time could be used, or self-instructional materials be made available, or a group of teachers work together periodically during their planning period or during "specials." Spreading out activities over a period of time usually gives better results from an all-day or half-day session anyway. Perhaps you can locate two hours for a "kick-off," and follow up with mini-sessions, individualized learning, or even a learning center in the library or work room.

What have other districts and other groups done that you could use? What expertise is available in your own school or district? Films? Videotapes? Booklets? Audiotapes that teachers can check out to listen to while driving? Can arrangements be made for teachers to visit an exemplary program?

In planning meetings, don't neglect physical comfort and conditions that allow for the kind of methods you may wish to use. Trying to do small group activities in a crowded room with no tables is a sure setup for failure.

Design activities. In the two sections on adult learning and staff development, we outlined principles that research and practice have shown to be effective. Activities should incorporate those principles as far as possible. If you are using consultants from a nearby college or another district, work with them to make sure they know what is expected. However, be aware that certain kinds of learnings lend themselves to interesting and effective activities easier than others. For example, it is easier to practice certain skills that teachers need to have, such as actively listening to a parent, than it is to influence attitudes that may subtly discourage parents from coming in to talk at all.

In designing activities, make sure they are varied, interesting, and appropriate to the type of learning and the goals being sought. They should also model good instruction. That is, there should be effective and efficient use of time, clear directions, provision for individual differences in completion time, task orientation, and other basic instructional techniques. You can find examples of learning activities that meet those criteria in Section VI.

Unless everyone knows everyone else, plan a "group-building" opening activity to help people get acquainted and prepare them mentally and psychologically for the activities to follow. Time spent in this way is not wasted. Examples are given in Section VI.

Implement activities. Do whatever has been planned, with a last-minute check on all details. Audiovisual materials ready? Refreshments? Needed supplies? Room arrangement? Staff development activities should be a model of organization and time utilization.

Remember that followup to see if additional help is needed to transfer learning to the job, to "coach," or simply to reassure and reinforce as people try out new ideas is part of implementation.

Evaluate. Evaluate the success of the activities in terms of the stated goals and objectives. How well did the participants actually learn and do whatever was stated as the objective? Will they put the ideas into practice? Did they perceive the information and activities as being useful and relevant? What improvements could be made?

Formative evaluation provides information about the effectiveness of an on-going program or activity so that revisions can be made as needed. Summative evaluation gives information about the effectiveness of the overall program and provides information for making decisions about future programs. The question should not be "Was this program a success or failure?" but "What did this program accomplish?" and "What have we learned to guide future staff development programs?"

More than one type of measure should be used. The short "reaction sheet" filled out at the end of a workshop or meeting that typically serves as evaluation seldom gives enough information. Sometimes it is inappropriate, as when a group has been working hard to develop a group feeling of support, cooperation, and understanding. Observations during the activity can tell much about skill level, interest, improvement, and the general effectiveness of the activity. Informal discussions with a small group or with individuals will often reveal the need for easily made corrections.

Follow-up evaluations can determine if the knowledge or skill was actually put into practice, and if people's perceptions of usefulness changed or stayed the same. Good evaluation is difficult, and we would recommend that someone with special skills be asked to help. Many school districts have evaluation experts who can make this step easier and better. Further information on evaluation in in Section IX.

Report. Report the process that was used, what was done, and the results and reactions to those people who should know and who are interested. Immediate feedback to staff developers may help them in their preparations for future training. Certainly a written report should be prepared for the administration, but teachers and other school personnel, parents, and the community at large are also interested and have a right to know. There is no need to wait until a staff development program is over to report on it. Parents often have no idea what teachers do on minimal days when their children are sent home early, or when school closes for a "teacher's meeting." Build understanding and support by letting them know. Staff development activities often make good newspaper, newsletter, or TV stories or spots. Use them as an opportunity to improve school-family relations, especially if the inservice topic is "Improving School-Family Relations Through Better Communication."

A final word of caution. Even though these sections on adult learning, staff development, and planning may seem lengthy, we have tried to summarize and explain as briefly as possible current best thinking and practices. Much more information and more detailed directions can be found in the resource listings. We would encourage anyone responsible for staff development to study those and other resources.

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Section IV

Guides for Effective Home-School Relations and Communications

Even though most of us are a little unsure about exactly what school-family relations and communications mean, we have a general concept. Both parents and educators placed it high on the list of things they considered most likely to have a good effect on the education students receive (Gallup, 1980).

As AEL has approached its work in school-family relations, we have looked at "relations" in terms of the connections between schools and families, when people or groups are mutually or reciprocally interested in a common matter. In the same way, we have looked at the term "communications" as implying a mutual effort to understand and share.

Some parents will, on their own, initiate and maintain a high level of communication and involvement with the school. Indeed, a few will keep that level so high that it becomes counter-productive for all concerned--too much of a good thing! But in most instances, parents depend on teachers and schools to initiate communication, and that is what this Resource Notebook focuses on. Do remember, though, that the communication we are after involves both parties communicating about their common concern--the child. Whenever possible, communications to the home should invite response.

"For further information call ______________________."

"If you have any questions, ______________________."

"I will be available between 3 and 4 in the afternoon.
If you want to talk with me, call ____________________."

"If you have any suggestions or questions, write in the
space below and send them back to school with your child
or drop them in the mail. We want your ideas."

Put the school's name, telephone number, street address, and mailing address on formal communications, especially those that ask for a response. At the beginning of each year, send home a card with that information on it, plus names parents should know--the principal, school secretary, and others as appropriate to the grade level. Suggest that the information be posted with their "most frequently called" numbers, or on the refrigerator. Consider "stick-on" labels to be attached to the telephone right under emergency numbers, especially if you have an absentee policy that encourages parents to call in. If that is done, someone should be there early in the day to answer the phone, or an answering and recording device should be hooked up, or both.

Nothing is more frustrating to parents than trying to do what they are supposed to (in this case, call in), only to be stymied because of a busy signal or unanswered phone. Many parents leave home early and are unable to call from work.

As you communicate with parents and the home, these guides will help.

- Recognize that schools and homes have shared goals.
- Respect all parents and communicate that respect.
- Acknowledge the changes that are taking place in the family.
- Understand the different types of school-family communication and the advantages and limitations of each.
- Tailor communications to your listeners and readers.
- Get expert help if you need it.

Recognize that schools and homes have shared goals. Schools and homes share many goals; the most important one is the nuture, development, and education of children. Schools and homes have different, but complementary roles to play in this process. Schools provide educational opportunities for children that most parents cannot; families provide education and development opportunities that school cannot.

Sometimes schools and families get caught up in their own concerns and forget that the child's education is their mutual interest. A teacher may give up and say "These parents aren't interested; they just don't care." Parents may remember their own less than happy experiences in school and approach a teacher or principal with leftover--and probably inappropriate--fear or hostility. Before any real progress can be made, teachers must believe that parents have a crucial role in their children's education, and parents and teachers must trust each other. Schools--administrators, teachers, specialists, and support personnel--must take the lead in helping to establish that trust, if it is missing, and must convey to parents in a positive way the school's belief in parents' importance in education.

Respect all parents and communicate that respect. Respect is not something that parents have to earn from a teacher, principal, or other school personnel. It is something that is their right as human beings. We do not have to agree with their ideas or actions, but we must respect them as people. Respect--or lack of respect--is communicated in many ways: Tone of voice, word choice, facial expression, time (How long do we make people wait? Are we too busy to hear their concerns?), body language, expectations, recognition as a person, and in many other subtle and not so subtle ways.

Schools must deal equally with all families, regardless of race, ethnic background, size of family, number of parents in the home, family income, educational level, rural or urban residence, or their skill in dealing with the school.

Let me share a personal exerience that taught me that lesson well. I once taught in a school where the educational level, income, and sophistication of the parents were as low as the size of families and number of problems were high. Concerned about one of the children in my class, I visited the home--to find an unemployed father attempting to care for the six children in a tiny house. His wife--the mother of the children--had abandoned them the week before. I left with a better understanding of my pupil--and a deeply-felt mixture of respect, admiration, and humility.

Many of our parents have personal, family, work, health, or other problems that we may know nothing about. That some are able to keep going at all is amazing. In smaller, closer communities, we often learned those things through the "grapevine." In a larger, more impersonal society we may have to make a special effort to understand and extend to parents the benefit of any doubts--and encourage them to let us know any special circumstances for the sake of the child.

Acknowledge the changes that are taking place in the family. "Forget the idealized, romanticized picture of the American family and learn to accept parents as they are" (Nedler & McAfee, 1979). No need to lament that both parents work away from home--most school people do the same thing! Whether they are single parents, parents in custody battles, out-of-work, with overwhelming personal problems, addicted to television or other things, too wrapped up in their own lives or career to spend much time with anybody else, or the "ideal family," most are genuinely concerned about their children. They may not know how or be able to show that concern in a way that helps the youngster in school, yet the concern is there.

As school people, we must seek more effective ways to communicate with this changed--and still changing--American family.

Understand the different types of school-family communication and the advantages and limitations of each. School-home communications take two major forms: those about the individual child and those of concern to all children and families school-wide (Gotts & Purnell, 1984). Communications about the individual child include reports about the child's academic progress and behavior, individual attendance and tardiness notices, get-acquainted calls or messages, formal and informal parent-teacher conferences, work samples, telephone calls, and individualized suggestions of what parents can do to help. School-wide communications include handbooks, newsletters, recorded messages, lunch menus, discipline codes, field trip permission forms, bulletin boards, and announcements and flyers of all kinds.

Parents and schools need both kinds of communication. Individualized messages are usually quite personal, confidential, and can be emotion-laden, dealing as they do with one child. These communications call for tact, consideration, empathy, and an understanding of the parent-child relationsh[illegible] For example, in a home where relations between child and parent are already strained, asking the parent to "be sure she does her homework" may make a bad situation worse.

All too often individual messages from school to home or home to school are about problems. Parents and schools need to hear more about the good things that happen!

Parents read and like school-wide communications such as newsletters and handbooks (Gotts, 1984). More effective use of these group communications and experimentation with new forms--"teletips" (recorded messages for which people call in), radio and television messages--may increase their value in school-family communications. Telling parents in advance about any novel school or class activity, reporting successes and concerns, "profiling" significant people (including parents and students), alerting parents to deadlines and upcoming events, lunch menus, PTA/PTO events, and many other information and trust building subjects are appropriate for school-wide communications. Use these communications as honest public relations and "marketing" techniques. Enthusiasm and a positive outlook are very much in order.

Much information that parents receive about school comes from their children and is on the order of "What did you do today?" "Nothing; same old thing." School-family communications can help parents put these reports in better perspective (Rutherford & Edgar, 1979).

Tailor communications to your listeners and readers. In all cases, communications should be in clear and understandable language, short, and to the point. Check and double-check written material for spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and other mechanics, as well as organization and clarity. In today's climate, you can be sure that your school will be judged by the written material you send out.

Avoid technical jargon--"staffing," "auditory memory," "visual-motor integration"--and the endless acronyms school people use as shorthand among themselves. Learn to put those words into plain English, Spanish, or whatever language the parent understands. Be specific enough that the parent knows what you mean. On the other hand, remember that parents are more knowledgeable, sophisticated, and wise than we sometimes give them credit for. The days when the doctor, lawyer, minister, and teacher were the only educated people around are long gone. A parent may not have a degree in education but may work with statistics, computers, and complex problems in mathematics, psychology, human nature, organization, and management everyday. Don't "talk down" to people.

Know who you are communicating with and meet them at a language level that establishes communication. Most of us do this automatically unless we are uneasy and defensive. If it's difficult, practice will help. If you miscommunicate, back up and start over!

Find out what types of communications work best with the families and school you are in and use them. How do you find out? Ask, collect data, use your judgment and sensitivity. If what you are doing isn't working, do something else.

Get expert help if you need it. Today's families are bombarded with highly sophisticated, carefully prepared "media campaigns." Many large school districts have experts in public relations, communication, graphics, photography, and other aspects of communicating with the public. If your district is so blessed, use them! If not, make sure that what you send out is the best you can do, because you're competing with the best.

Sometimes school psychologists or social workers have special training in human relations and can observe, demonstrate, or coach in needed areas. Since many of the skills needed to communicate with parents are the same as those needed in other organizations and institutions, see if they have some resident experts they would share. For example, many organizations are teaching their employees how to listen attentively--a skill we all need.

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Section V

Especially for Administrators and Policy-Makers

School board members, superintendents, and principals have always known that "the central office plays a critical role" in any school changes. "The coordination, leadership, and clout it brings to the effort can make the difference between success and failure" (Dianda, 1984). This is as true in staff development to achieve better school-family communications as it is in any other aspect of education.

Now, we're not suggesting that superintendents and board members have to attend a series of inservice workshops on school-family communications--although we hope that you would find them interesting and valuable--and we know that your presence at even one would make them more important to everyone who does attend!

Rather, this section is a salute to administrators and policy-makers to whom school personnel and parents look for "coordination, leadership, and clout." Your support will do much to help teachers, specialists, and support staff achieve better school-family relations for better education. Building principals, who help set the tone and climate for school operations including relations with parents, will find many suggestions that apply to them as well as to teachers.

The vagueness and highly political nature of some "parent involvement" in the last two decades has made many school board and administrators uneasy, even as they know that lack of parent involvement and support is a warning sign that a school may be in trouble (Dianda, 1984). But parents don't want to take over policy-making and administration. John Goodlad (1984) summarized the current state of affairs:

> Polls and surveys show that [parents] would like a greater say in the affairs of their schools. But this does not mean that parents want to take over the schools. Some do, but most don't. Rather, they want to be kept informed in as clear a fashion as possible, especially about their children's progress and welfare. Further, they want the decisions and those who make them to be visible. They would prefer to leave the running of the school to the principal, and the classrooms to the teachers and, if possible, to hold them accountable (p. 273).

So what can and should district policy-makers and administrators do? The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), based on extensive surveys of administrators, policy-makers, parents, and teachers in the southwest region of the United States, has these recommendations:

> **First**, in addition to providing preservice and inservice training for teachers, principals and other school administrators should be included in parent involvement training activities as they often set the rules and norms in schools. If they are not aware of the benefits of parent involvement and/or are not skilled in working with parents, school administrators may set norms which discourage teachers from using the parent involvement skills and knowledge they have acquired.
>
> **Second**, in order to encourage school district staff at all levels to develop better relations with parents, district policies should be written so that they clearly specify this as a desired goal. Responses from the superintendents' and school board presidents' surveys indicate that the existence of written policies encouraging parent involvement is related to increased levels of a variety of parent activities in the schools.
>
> **Third**, if districts are designing a parent involvement program, they should again view the various types of parent involvement as a developmental sequence, both from the teachers' and the parents' point of view. Increasing parent involvement in the role of audience [attending school events, receiving and acting on messages] requires comparatively less effort and skill on the part of both teachers and parents than would parent involvement as home tutors, decision makers, advocates or co-learners. Therefore, the skill levels and estimates of available time for each should be the focus of program efforts (Stallworth & Williams, 1983, pp. 17-18).

Further information on the various roles parents can play in relation to schools and on the research results is available from SEDL.

Although improving school-family relations and communications does not have the glamour of "training for high-tech," or "excellence," it is nevertheless basic to establishing and maintaining good schools. "Children whose parents encourage and support schooling have an added advantage in school" (Epstein, 1984). Parents who encourage and support schooling give teachers, administrators, and school-board members an added advantage in educating those children. And that is what this Resource Notebook is about.

Many schools and districts periodically survey parents and the community to determine their perceptions of what the school is doing and if improvement is needed in any area. Typically, a questionnaire is sent home or mailed. AEL has developed a short, personalized telephone interview that has been highly successful in getting detailed information and reactions that often don't show up on a questionnaire answer--if, indeed, the questionnaire is returned. People are responsive (over 95 percent of those called agreed to participate), the sample is thus accurate, and the entire procedure is effective and efficient. The interview questions are in Appendix C. Complete directions for sampling, administering, and coding are available from AEL (Gotts & Sattes, 1982). If a more extensive needs assessment is desired, a systematic process is described in Appendix D, with a complete manual available from AEL.

The school-family relations and communications we focus on should fit into and complement almost any school program, because they are based upon AEL's long experience with schools, families, and children in the Appalachian Region, and upon recent research in school-family relations. We have designed this Resource Notebook around what schools and parents actually do and what they say works, plus what school personnel said they would like to have more training in.

In addition, we have focused on:

1. School-home communications that busy teachers and principals can do; many are things people already do, but unsystematically and perhaps uncertainly.
2. Low-cost but effective techniques.
3. Techniques that complement other proven approaches, or at least don't conflict with them. For example, parents should feel welcome to call or come to the school to talk with the teacher, but they should not expect to interrupt class or even class preparation. We suggest that parents be given a specific procedure for getting in touch with the teacher by telephone or in person.
4. A wide variety of communication strategies, so that school personnel can choose those that best fit their situation.
5. Making sure that the form and tone of the communications invites and encourages a mutual concern for the welfare of children and schools.

Many of these forms of communication require board and administrative approval and support; some do not. Some require money; some do not. Some are more effective in elementary schools, some in secondary.

Based on research done at AEL (Gotts, 1983), we make a case for a different model of parent communication and involvement at the secondary level than at elementary. Such a distinction may prove useful to local districts as they study and perhaps modify policies and practices in local schools.

The differences are shown in the chart on the following page.

MODELS OF SCHOOL-FAMILY COMMUNICATIONS/INVOLVEMENT

	Primary	Secondary
Essential Characteristics	- Relations are proximate or physically close; involvement is expressed by being present.	Relations take place at a distance, with parents monitoring progress; involvement means being present when needed.
Group Involvement	- General purpose parent groups.	Special purpose parent groups.
Monitoring School	- May visit school and review student work.	Reads newsletter; visits only as needed.
Teacher Contact	- May regularly confer with teacher to monitor progress.	Visits teacher if special need is identified.
Academic Focus	- Basic skills, adjustment, and social integration.	Graduation credits and progress, specialized progress.
Attendance Focus	- Presence at school.	Presence in individual classes.
Discipline	- Problems require parent-teacher negotiation.	Problems require parent-teacher-student-others negotiation.
Special Events and Consequences	- Events have a general focus for all parents of a classroom or school; the parent is to view all children's work as well as their child's; strengthens the sense of neighborhood and school ownership.	Parents are drawn by interest or their child's involvement to sports, musical and dramatic events; their child may be seen here as an independent performer; strengthens the sense of a broader community and school ownership.

The differing patterns imply and call for different practices of school-family communications at these two levels. Visitation nights and scheduled teacher conferences for all parents are emphasized at the elementary level. In secondary schools, informative, timely newsletters draw parents selectively into activities. Conferences at this level are not routine, but are definitely available to handle special difficulties or problems. An early warning/communication system should be kept in place at both elementary and secondary levels to notify parents at the earliest possible time of their need to step in to help regarding academic, social, or behavioral problems. Prompt notification of student absence from school, for example, is valued by parents at both levels (Gotts, 1983).

In addition, we have identified topics that parents and schools said they wanted and needed to know about regardless of age or grade.

AREAS FOR HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS

- Academic progress
- Homework policy and parent role
- Attendance
- Code of conduct/expectations
- Student behavior and health
- Testing for screening/placement
- Local program emphasis
- Special events (e.g., open house, science fairs)
- Extracurricular activities (e.g., athletic program, drama, concerts)
- Operation of local schools
- Opportunities to help and support the school

(Gotts, 1983)

There are far more ways to get home-school communications going about these topics than we typically use, as the following list suggests. You can probably add a few more!

VEHICLES OF HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS

- Newsletters/report cards
- District and building handbooks
- Interim progress reports sent home halfway through the marking period
- Phone report
- Special notices
- Letter or teacher note
- Homework to be acknowledged
- Individual conference, small group conferences
- Parent-teacher group (local or district)
- Orientation meeting
- Open house
- Information hot line
- Recorded message
- Parent Resource and Information Center
- Informal network
- Mass media—television, radio, newspapers
- Children
- Community event
- Tutorial guide or academic guidance sheets

(Gotts, 1983)

Administrators are usually directly or indirectly responsible for several of these, including newsletters and handbooks. Since our research has identified them as being valued and important sources of information, we have developed some background information and guidelines that you and your district may find useful. Communicating Through the Home-School Handbook begins on page 9. Communicating Through Newsletters in Secondary Schools begins on page 13.

Communicating Through The Home-School Handbook: Guidelines for Principals

Edward E. Gotts

Many elementary principals rely on handbooks as a means of communicating about their schools to parents, school personnel, and the broader community. The individual principal typically assembles and writes the handbook for use in a particular school and neighborhood setting. The handbook may include personal statements reflecting the principal's own views on childrearing and schooling and on ways that home and school can work together to accomplish their shared educational mission.

AEL's study of the handbook as a communication device supports the preceding picture. Further, the study underscores the thoroughly personal and informal process by which the principal prepares or "borrows" a handbook and then periodically modifies it in response to changing local circumstances. Analogously to the formation of pearls, moreover, our findings make us suspect that certain parts of any given handbook are added layer upon layer as a protective shield whose purpose is to smoothe over some underlying source of irritation or to guard against potential conflict.

In view of the informal process just identified, we were not wholly surprised to find no source of guidelines or standards to assist the principal who desires to prepare or revise a handbook. Yet our study revealed the handbook is such an important technique that its development should not be shaped solely by chance circumstances or the personal inclinations of the writer. Rather, the principal can best prepare a handbook that meets its intended communication objectives by combining local and personal perspectives with a more comprehensive and systematic approach. The remainder of this brief presentation summarizes useful guidelines that we have uncovered in our work. These guidelines cover three issues confronting the handbook's would-be author: (1) presenting contents within the context of the handbook's organization, (2) the process of preparation, and (3) using the handbook effectively.

Organization and Contents

Contents should be presented clearly and concisely, using an informative conversational tone. This can be achieved by imagining, while reading aloud, that an individual parent or a new staff member is listening to the presentation. Educational jargon should be used sparingly. The principal should be guided by imagination into a natural and comfortable style of expression that reflects his or her personal approach to school administration and to school-community relations. Fidelity to both this inner vision and its outward expression are essential, since the handbook will set the tone for all that is to follow. That is to say, the "correct" style is one which creates in the reader an accurate expectation of how the principal and the school will come across during subsequent contacts throughout the year. Accordingly, idealism must be tempered with realism.

Organization should commence with the more general and perennially used content. Each of the following should contribute to the handbook's usefulness: table of contents; list of personnel (including itinerants) and

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their assignments; named parents who serve in leadership roles; the year's calendar, including PTA/PTO meetings; a sample daily/weekly schedule, with times; statement of the school's philosophy, curricular approach, and distinctive characteristics; a concise reference list of school policies, with mention of where more complete discussion can be located; and special programs, emphases, and activities of the local school system.

Next, more specialized and limited topics should be presented. Brief treatments of the following areas are known to be helpful: attendance policy and notification of absence or tardiness; the grading and reporting system, with particular mention of "interim" reports, promotion/retention policy, and classification or streaming or tracking of students; transfer procedures; free textbooks and supply fees; homework expectations; student health and immunization policies; student dress and appearance; standards of conduct and discipline code; supplemental or optional instruction; school lunch and nutrition program; transportation, transit to and from school, excuse notes, and early departures; birthday parties, open house, and other special occasions; safety, including dangerous or disruptive materials found in students' possession; administering prescribed medications; exceptional children in regular classrooms; use of the school telephone; emergencies; communications procedures regarding student difficulties or problems; and safety patrol and other activities involving designated groups of students, including annual trips and outings for selected grade levels.

Finally, operation of the home-school partnership should be considered in terms of: the respective responsibilities of school and home; how communications are to be initiated, conducted, and encouraged; availability of staff for conferences; classroom visitation, including restrictions on visitation for designated persons—e.g., restrictions resulting from child custody decisions; desired parental role in homework; special guidance the school is prepared to offer parents; suggestions for helping the child do well in school; assurance that potentially conflicting interests of home and school will be handled constructively and for the child's benefit; parent-teacher organizations and activities; parents as volunteers; and other opportunities open to parents who are willing to be involved more extensively.

Handbook Preparation Process

The foregoing comments on contents and style will enable the principal to achieve a more comprehensive and systematic approach, without losing local and personal perspectives. Yet to assure greater precision of local perspective, the process can be enhanced by first holding discussions with faculty on several of the content areas. Using an in-service workshop format, faculty can sharpen the effort's focus by indicating where they stand on the issues; suggesting training they desire to prepare them for implementation; and exploring problems which will require sensitive treatment.

Once the principal's and faculty's views and concerns are expressed, a small, randomly selected sample of parents can be interviewed by PTA/PTO leaders or other volunteers to determine their personal experiences and desires relative to home-school communications. The interview questions can particularly probe into areas that will be most conducive to making sound decisions about the handbook's design and emphasis.

AEL has conducted a small-scale study of handbook preparation using this suggested process. The process was effective in the sense of delivering to the principal, before a handbook's revision was commenced, (a) clarification of the communication challenges posed by the parents' and faculty's needs and readiness and (b) guidance regarding priority areas for inclusion. The latter of these results allowed the principal to use priorities also to exclude certain contents which seemed less vital at the time within that neighborhood school's immediate community--thereby making the size of the handbook and its revision more manageable. Through this process of study we have also learned about some particularly helpful contents to include on "operation of the home-school partnership." We are prepared in 1984 to share these results with Kanawha County principals.

The simple-to-use school "self-study" techniques that AEL has developed render the task well within reach for the average principal who is unaccustomed to conducting formal research. Rightly understood, the purpose of the study process is to provide quality information in support of the principal's decision making about (a) what to write and (b) how to focus the effort in order to meet identified needs. The principal who is already intimately acquainted with faculty and parent views on these matters can bypass the data gathering stage and turn at once to summarizing on paper what is known. These summaries will then guide the handbook preparation process.

Using The Handbook Effectively

Time is the essence of effective handbook usage. The most opportune time for distribution is at the very beginning of the school year. To accomplish this result, all data gathering and summarization should be completed the preceding spring. Armed with this preparation, the principal can complete writing and/or revision as a part of the administrative post-school year wrap-up in June. That leaves the summer for rereading and minor touch up. Typing and duplication can be completed by the school office as a part of the fall pre-term start up.

If this planned timeline looks firm by the end of the present school year, parents can be alerted in advance to anticipate the new handbook's availability the following fall. Making such a public commitment will help insure that the necessary priority and effort will be assigned to get the job done on schedule.

There are options for selecting the occasion and means of distribution. The handbook may be passed out at the year's first PTA/PTO meeting, with follow-up for all parents who could not attend. The PTA/PTO might instead perform a deliberate person-to-person distribution. Room mothers might, with the help of enlisted volunteers, do the same thing, or the fall term might feature a "know your school" open house. This last option is not as workable, because an open house in early fall requires more effort and momentum than can normally be mustered so soon after school's opening. Alternatively, children might carry home an attention-catching notice announcing that the handbook can either (a) be picked up at school by the parent, or (b) upon presentation at school of a signed tear-off request, to be carried home by the child. The point is to make sure that parents receive it in a state of heightened expectancy.

If the next scheduled PTA/PTO meeting features an interesting discussion of the handbook (with announced emphasis on selected topics), familiarization, study, and use will be encouraged. Thereafter, throughout the school year, if staff will respond to parent inquiries by turning to the handbook and reviewing with parents the relevant sections--even when they perfectly well know the answers--they will by example encourage parents to seek answers there to their questions.

Toward the end of the school year, the principal may wish to discuss with a small sample of parents and teachers what the handbook has meant that year to their partnership with one another in supporting the child's progress in school. The questions for this can be borrowed directly from among those already used during the handbook planning phase a year earlier. Typical responses, with personal identifying information omitted, can then be summarized on a single sheet to be bound into the front of the handbook when it is next duplicated. The sheet can be titled in some appealing manner. For example: "What Parents and Teachers are Saying about this Handbook!"

AEL Study Results

The preceding suggestion also provides a fitting way to close this brief set of handbook guidelines. Here are some of the things being said about a handbook that was prepared in the manner described above:

- Including the schedule "supports informed participation."
- It "helps parents who can't come to school."
- Parents used it to "explain more about school to my child."
- It "makes parents feel more comfortable about visiting the school."
- It "encourages school visitation and conferences."
- It contained "all the information we needed to know."
- It "strengthens my relationship with the school."
- It helped me "deal with my child's academic problems."

COMMUNICATING THROUGH NEWSLETTERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Edward E. Gotts

Findings

In an AEL study of school-home communications, perhaps the most interesting finding is that newsletters may well be the most effective general method for informing parents at the secondary level. Of the common communications practices available to secondary schools, newsletters accounted for more contacts than did any other method. When assessed by means of parents' own free recall or experiences, slightly over eighty percent of all parents interviewed mentioned them as communications they had received.

Attitudes toward the newsletters were not requested directly; instead they were inferred from parents' spontaneous remarks. In such remarks, parents favorably mentioned newsletters sixty-five percent of the time, neutrally thirty-three percent, and negatively only two percent. Compared with their spontaneous comments about other types of communications, no other types received so large a proportion of favorable and so small a proportion of unfavorable reactions.

Finally, we assessed from the content of their spontaneous remarks whether parents actually read the newsletters they received. This method of inquiry was used to avoid biasing parents in the direction of exaggerating their use of the newsletter. Over seventy percent of all parents, who recalled receiving newsletters, appeared to have read them. If more casual reading is counted, the number rises to nearly ninety percent. Thus, of those who discussed their use of the newsletters, only ten percent appeared not to have read them. Moreover parents commented readily on ways that they had acted on the information provided.

In summary, a large majority of parents mentioned newletters as their most frequent means for receiving information about secondary schools. They appreciated being informed in this way. More importantly, by a wide margin parents read and acted on information provided. This communications success, further, was achieved through the use of newsletters that often were prepared hurriedly and whose quality might, if rated objectively, be graded as average to good. Thus, even better results might reasonably be expected as school personnel were to stress the following guidelines for making newsletters communicate more effectively.

Guidelines for Newsletters

Many of the guidelines presented here may seem to be based on common sense and certainly would be supported by sound journalistic thinking. The guidelines resulted, however, neither from a common sense approach nor from a handbook of journalism. Rather, these have been extracted largely from the spontaneous remarks of the several hundred parents who participated in the AEL interviews about school-home communications.

To be effective, newsletters should be:

- informative of what is happening at the school
- timely, to let parents anticipate, schedule, provide transportation, attend, etc.*
- brief and to the point, with the main ideas being presented at the beginning of each article or section
- clean and uncluttered, with headings to make it easy to find particular topics
- somewhat informal and personal rather than stilted and formal
- livened up with simple graphics that capture attention, summarize ideas, remind, redirect, convey attitudes, etc.

Newsletter content should emphasize: recent accomplishments (academic, athletic, artistic, school appearance, service, attendance); upcoming events, schedule changes, conference times; scholarship application information; trips or travel opportunities; human interest items (but not gossip) featuring students, parent volunteers or leaders, staff; program emphases and strengths of the curriculum; transportation arrangements; activities scheduled for parents, students, and communities. A brief but comprehensive calendar on the cover page should be cross-referenced to fuller treatments on the particular numbered pages of the newsletters.

At the start of the school year or the new term, when classes and staff assignments change, parents wish to learn the names of teachers, counselors, and office staff; to receive advance schedules of all athletic and other extracurricular events; and to be informed about the school's goals, special projects, discipline and dress codes, etc.

Other guidelines for style suggest that humor should be used sparingly. If it is to be used, it should be reviewed in advance to assure that it is indeed humorous to most readers and offensive to none. The writer must be sensitive about the tone. It should be forthright rather than subtle; objective and positive at the same time; stimulating and tending toward mild enthusiasm; and revealing of a sincere desire to communicate and inform. Within this frame of references, there is room for personal messages and viewpoints. The tone of the newsletters will often be more apparent to the ear than to the eye, so copy should be evaluated for tone by reading it aloud.

Newsletters, we find, are read by students as well as parents. Thus the writer and editor will do well to consider this dual audience. For the same reason, it may be desirable to have both student and parent representatives involved in the planning and review of the newsletter contents. We have witnessed schools where both parents and students were active not only in this way but also as active contributors of written material for the newsletter. These kinds of arrangements, while far less common, were found to add much to the quality of the newsletters. No matter who contributes, the newsletters must have an editor who makes final decisions about content and style. Usually this will be one of the school's administrators or a mature faculty member. A journalism advisor may sometimes be a natural for this assignment. Interestingly, one of the most ambitious and successful newsletter editors we have encountered was the head of a science department.

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*Most negative remarks about newsletters were from parents who claimed they had received information too late!

Finally, the newsletter should set the scene for all other school-home communications. In this sense, it must be reliable and predictable. It should invite neither more nor less parent and community involvement than the school is ready to handle. Staff, parents, and students, thus, will receive a unified message about the school's intended practices of communication.

Tips for Setting Up Better Newsletters and Newsbriefs

Keep the items concise and the paragraphs short. Make it easy for readers to "read on the run" and to choose what interests them.

Use headlines above stories and capitalize all the letters. Be sure the head summarizes the story. Do not use handwritten headings.

Do not use vertical headings with one letter under the other. We read from left to right rather than from top to bottom and a heading of this nature is hard to read.

Use margins and white space to illuminate the message. A cluttered publication distracts the reader.

Double space between each news item and between the heading and the story. Single space each paragraph.

Underline the first line or phrase of each paragraph. Also underline names of people in the articles.

Use "bullets" for emphasizing important points. These are made by typing a small letter o and filling it in with a black felt-tip pen--like this o o.

Always proofread carefully. Do not allow typographical errors or grammatical errors to mar the publication.

Recognize today's realities in your writing. Don't assume that only mothers are going to be involved and responsible for school concerns. Avoid stereotypes of any kind.

And Finally...

There is always room for improvement, so make it a continuing process--look for more effective approaches and strive to make the publication as professional as possible.

Remember--if the information is important enough to be sent to parents, it is important enough to send it in the most attractive and readable fashion.

—Adapted from Kansas City Board of
Education, Public Information
Office. Dr. John Wherry, Director.

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Section VI

Especially for Teachers and Specialists

It is one thing to know that school personnel need more training in school-family relations, and that changes in staff development are being recommended. It is quite another to pull all the ideas together and implement them in actual inservice training. In this section we have chosen a few high priority goals and topics related to school-family communications to show different ways sound staff development principles can be used to help develop an on-going, flexible inservice program.

Our intent is to provide a non-prescriptive model that those responsible for staff development can use "as is," learn from, and then go on to use the principles and techniques in developing their own staff training.

To accomplish this goal, we have developed six inservice training sessions, some of which could be divided into two shorter sessions. They are:

1. School-Family Relations: What We Know
2. School-Family Communications: In Plain Words
3. Listen With Your Mind and Heart
4. School-Family Communications: The Spoken Word
5. School-Family Communications: The Written Word and Other Symbols
6. School-Family Communications: Academic Guidance Sheets
7. Parent-Teacher Conferences

The first five are designed to be used in sequence.

In addition, we have compiled sources and made suggestions for staff developers on how to plan an inservice training session on parent-teacher conferences, so they have an opportunity to practice the principles they have learned.

We have made no attempt to include all possible areas related to school-family communications. For example, we have included little or nothing on recruiting and using parent volunteers in schools, teaching parents how to be more effective teachers of their own children, recruiting parents to support general school activities, to be community representatives, or advocates. All these efforts are quite appropriate.

However, we have chosen to focus on things that busy teachers and principals can do. Indeed, many school people are already doing them, but sometimes unsystematically. We also looked for techniques that are low in cost. They complement, or at least don't conflict with current best thinking about good instructional practices for children. For example, we encourage teachers to tell parents the time and place they will be available for personal discussions or telephone calls. This helps avoid the time-consuming practice of parents expecting to drop by to see the teacher.

We have suggested a wide variety of teaching methods, ranging from interdependent group learning to self-instruction, but we have avoided special audio-visual materials which may or may not be available. We have incorporated several well-researched instructional practices, such as:

- building upon information and experience learners already have,
- actively involving learners,
- demonstrating,
- providing for practice,
- coaching,
- using a variety of instructional techniques, and
- planning for transfer and follow-up.

Each of the training sessions is set up in similar fashion. There are: instructions to the leader, objectives for the participants, materials needed to carry out the activity, procedures to follow, and follow-up/evaluation.

In the procedures, there are:

- Materials the leader can read or paraphrase to give information, directions, and guidance to participants. These "direct instructions" or information appear in regular typeface.
- Tips and guidance for the leader. These are indicated by boldface type.
- Handouts to use during the training, with a copy which can be used for duplication purposes in Appendix E.

Throughout, we encourage staff development specialists to adapt to the participants' special needs and situations. For example, there is much variation in how well participants in inservice training know each other. If participants don't know each other, a "get-acquainted" activity should be used at the beginning of each session. If participants already know each other, they might become a more cohesive working group by spending a few minutes sharing something related to the topic. For example, they might share their most heart-warming encounter with a parent, or the funniest, or the most troublesome.

Before attempting to use any of these activities, take time to study them thoroughly so you understand the procedures and the reasons those procedures were used.

Good Luck!

School-Family Relations: What We Know

To the Leader:

In working with a group of people, leaders are often faced with the task of having people learn some basic background information. In many cases, they need this basic information at the first meeting so they have a common basis for proceeding. Often, there is not lead time to distribute reading material to people prior to the meeting. Just as often, they won't have read it anyway! The usual way to solve this problem is to have a lecture, perhaps with some audiovisual aids to make points clear and liven up the presentation. In this introductory session, we are going to use another method of helping a group learn essential facts and concepts. Called "Jigsaw," it has been adapted from methods designed to encourage interdependence, cooperation, and responsibility in school students. We are using it to introduce some key ideas about parent involvement, and school-home relations, to set the stage for the "what and how" staff development sessions that follow. However, you can use the technique for any factual, narrative material that you wish to present. For adult learners, it may be that the best thing about it is that it requires them to be active and lets them put their own good teaching skills into practice. Also, since the technique is not widely used, the novelty should spark people's interest. Who knows, perhaps they may even try it in their own classrooms. Because people will finish reading and studying at different times, have additional related materials available for them to go to.

We have prepared four readings on school-home relations, four "expert sheets," and a quiz, so that you may use them "as is" if you wish. They are labeled Handouts VI-1 through VI-5, but because of their length do not appear separtely in the Appendix. However, you may also prepare your own material, add locally pertinent materials, or a topic that local assessment shows is needed.

The four subjects we have prepared are:

Reading One: Why Parent Involvement? (Handout VI-1)

Reading Two: Parent Involvement: Perceptions of Parents and Educators (Handout VI-2)

Reading Three: The Modern Dilemma of School-Home Communications (Handout VI-3)

Reading Four: Single Parents and the Schools (Handout VI-4)

"Expert Sheets"--part of the Jigsaw method--have also been prepared for and attached to each reading. The concluding "quiz" is Handout VI-5.

How to Use Jigsaw II

The directions for Jigsaw II have been adapted for adult learners in typical staff development sessions from an article by Robert Slavin of the Johns Hopkins Team Learning Project (1978).

Jigsaw II

Jigsaw is a technique developed by Elliot Aronson (1978) and his associates at the University of Texas and the University of California at Santa Cruz. It is a relatively simple technique, designed to increase participants' sense of responsibility for their learning by making each one an "expert" on one part of an instructional unit, and then having each student teach the part on which he is an "expert" to the others on his team. Jigsaw II is based on Aronson's original Jigsaw concept, but has many different features.

For more information on Original Jigsaw, see The Jigsaw Classroom by Elliot Aronson, 1978. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications.

OVERVIEW

Jigsaw II can be used whenever the material to be studied is in narrative form. It is more appropriate in areas in which concepts rather than rote memory is the goal. The basic "raw material" for Jigsaw II should be a chapter, report, or similar narrative or descriptive material.

In Jigsaw II, participants work in heterogeneous teams. They are assigned chapters or other units to read, and are given "expert sheets" which contain different topics for each team member to focus on as he or she reads. When everyone has finished reading, participants from different teams who had the same topics meet to discuss their topics in an "expert group." The "experts" then return to their teams and take turns teaching their teammates about their topics. Finally, all of the participants take a quiz that covers all of the topics. The key to Jigsaw is interdependence--every participant depends on his or her teammates to provide the information they need to know.

PREPARING TO USE JIGSAW II

To make your materials, follow these steps:

1. Find several short chapters, reports, or other short units that each cover a similar amount of material. If you plan to have participants read in the training session, the sections should not require more than a half hour to read; if you plan to assign the reading for outside work, they can be longer.

2. Make an "expert sheet" for each unit. An expert sheet tells participants what they should concentrate on while they read, and tells them which expert group they will work with. It consists of topics that are central to the chapter. As much as possible, the topics should cover issues that appear throughout the readings, so that recurrent themes and significant ideas are reinforced. Examples of "expert sheets" are attached to the back of each reading in the set we have prepared.

3. Make a quiz for each unit. The quiz should consist of approximately eight questions, two for each topic. The questions should require considerable understanding, because the participants will have had plenty of time to discuss their topics in-depth, and easy questions would fail to challenge those who had done a good job in preparation. However, the questions should not be obscure.

All participants must answer all questions. The quiz should take no more than ten minutes.

Time Allocation

Time allowed for Jigsaw II depends on how long it takes participants to read the material and how much time you wish to set aside for the Jigsaw units. The sequence of activities and approximate times required are presented below; you may shorten or lengthen the suggested times to fit your schedule and the time needed for your particular materials.

Sequence of Jigsaw activities (Times vary with length of material):

1. Pass out expert sheets and readings or assign topics if everyone is reading the same material (about 5 minutes).
2. Learners read material (about 20 to 30 minutes).
3. Learners meet in expert groups (about 15 minutes).
4. Learners return to report to their teams (about 20 minutes).
5. Quiz (about 10 minutes).

Total time: 70-80 minutes

INTRODUCING JIGSAW II TO YOUR CLASS

Before you begin to use Jigsaw II you will need to have ready the following materials:

1. Participant copies of the reading units you plan to use (chapter, report, etc.).
2. An "expert sheet" for each student.

Step 1: Introduce Jigsaw II

You will need:

- Copies of the reading material for each participant.
- An "expert sheet" for each participant.

1. Introduce the Idea of Jigsaw II

To explain Jigsaw II to the participants, you might say the following:

> "We are going to be using a new way of learning called Jigsaw. In Jigsaw, you will work in learning teams to study reading material. Each of you will have a special topic to learn about. After you have read the material, you will discuss your topic with members of other teams, and then you will return to your team as an expert to teach your teammates about your topic. Finally, everyone will be quizzed on all of the topics. The topics are like the pieces of a puzzle--each expert will be working to fit his or her piece in so that the whole team can do well on the quiz."

2. Inform Students of Their Team Assignments

> "Now I will tell you which team you will be on. When I read your name, find your teammates and sit next to them." (Can name group, if you wish.)

Read the names of the members of each team and designate a place for them to assemble. Participants can move chairs together to face each other or move to tables.

3. Pass out Reading Material and Expert Sheets

Distribute the reading material and expert sheets to each student. Then continue as follows:

> "As I mentioned before, the idea behind Jigsaw is that each person becomes an expert on a particular topic and then teaches it to his or her teammates. The first step in this process is to read the material, look in particular for information mentioned on the expert sheets."

Step 2: Introducing Expert Groups

You will need:

- Your reading materials

1. Finish Reading

Let the students finish their reading. Ask those who finish early to go back over the material to be sure they understand it.

2. Introduce Expert Groups

As soon as almost all students have finished reading, introduce expert groups as follows:

"Now you will all have a chance to discuss your topics with others who have the same topic. In a moment, I will ask everyone who has Reading 1 to get together, everyone who has Reading 2 to get together, and so on. In these expert groups you will be able to talk about your topic to decide what the most important things are about it. You should share your information so that others will share theirs. I will appoint a leader for each expert group. The leader's job is to make sure that the expert group does its job well by trying to get every student in the expert group to help add ideas. Fold your arms across your chest if you understand.

Check for understanding. Explain further if needed.

Point out a place for each expert group to assemble. If there are more than seven participants in one group, break the group into two. Appoint a leader for each group or let each group select a leader. When participants are in their expert groups, have them start discussing their topics. Encourage them to try to anticipate what may be on the quiz, and recommend that they make lists of what they think are important answers to the questions asked in the topics. Work with each expert group, one at a time, to help them structure their task and use the time effectively. You may wish to give the expert groups special hints, so that they will have truly unique information to bring back to their teams.

Step 3: Team Reports and Quiz

You will need:

- Your reading materials.
- A copy of the quiz for each student.

1. Team Reports

Have participants return to their teams and report on what they learned in their expert groups. Again, participants should emphasize the main points and anticipate what might be on the quiz in preparing their teammates. If you wish, you may have a discussion of the material following the team reports. If you do, try to draw on the "experts" in the discussion to emphasize their special skills and knowledge.

2. Quiz

Fifteen minutes before the end of the period, have participants take the quiz.

From: Robert E. Slavin. Using Student Team Learning: The Johns Hopkins Team Learning Project. Baltimore, Maryland: Center for Social Organization of Schools. The Johns Hopkins University, 1978.

Note: For staff development purposes the score is not important; the learning is what counts, so we recommend that the quiz not be "graded." However, responses should be discussed so participants can learn what they have missed.

Reading One: Why Parent Involvement?

Note: The "expert sheet" for this reading is at the end. The references are in Appendix A, Selected Resources on Parent Involvement.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory recently compiled and synthesized research about parent involvement and schools. This summary makes a strong case for systematic parent involvement.

I. Parent involvement in schools can make a major difference to children and schools. Research has shown parent involvement to be significantly related to:

   A. Improved academic achievement
   (Bittle, 1975; Boger, 1978; Comer, 1980; Duncan, 1969; Gillum, Schooley & Novak, 1977; Ingram, 1978; Hofmeister, 1977; Karracker, 1972; McKinney, 1975; Mize, 1977; Shelton & Dobson, 1973; Smith & Brahce, 1963; Trovato & Bucher, 1980.)

   B. Improved school behavior
   (Barth, 1979; Comer, 1980; Edlund, 1969; Fairchild, 1976.)

   C. Increased attendance
   (Comer, 1980; Duncan, 1969; Parker & McCoy, 1977, Sheats & Dunkleberger, 1979.)

   Additional benefits to schools include:

   D. Increased community support for schools

   E. Increased resources: human, financial, and material

II. Parents want to be involved; they feel education is important and they want to stay informed of their child's progress in school (Etheridge, Collins, & Coats, 1979; Gallup, 1980; Gotts, 1983; Hubbell, 1979; Valentin & Alston, 1978).

III. Schools need to be flexible in defining participation. There are many ways that parents can be involved; not everything is appropriate for every parent. Most parents are interested in things which affect their own child. Consequently, school governance--or advisory board participation--would probably attract a small number of parents (Alden, 1979; Lightfoot, 1978).

Involvement may mean little direct participation, such as receiving communication from school or teacher, coming to the school building only when necessary, or being in the audience at school programs. Parents may also be very active, involved as tutors, volunteer typists, lunchroom monitors, etc. Membership in the PTA, Boosters, or special fund-raising group for facility improvement is yet another type of participation. "Parents-as-teachers" is a popular concept, especially in preschool and early elementary years, meaning direct involvement in the teaching-learning process, usually in the home environment.

IV. Schools need to take the initiative in establishing vehicles of communication, and in inviting participation and involvement. When teachers make more frequent contact with parents, parents tend to make more frequent contact with teachers. Implementation of communication between the school and family is associated with increases in the number of parent-initiated contacts with the school (Bittle, 1975; Duncan, 1969; Ingram, 1978; Mager, 1980; Parker & McCoy, 1977).

Schools have access to the information parents are most interested in (academic progress, behavioral difficulty, etc.) and should be the ones to routinely keep parents informed.

Personal contact is the most effective method of reaching people (Ingram, 1972).

V. Because the percentage of voters who are parents of school-age students is declining (projected to be less than 20 percent by 1985), involvement needs to extend to the community at large.

A. Voters who receive some form of communication from schools are more likely to vote and to vote favorably on school-related issues (Carter reported in Ingram, 1978).

B. Hubbell (1979) found that two of three adults have no contact with public schools but want to be informed of things like curriculum, budget, etc.

Given the two Statements A and B above, it is not surprising that public schools have been faced with decreasing community support and public confidence. There are many ways to involve the non-parent sector, such as:

- increased use of community experts and resources,
- senior citizen involvement (Note: By 1990, there will be more people 55 years and older than there are students in grades K-12.),
- use of mass media,
- newsletter to community members, and
- community education/recreation (Sattes, 1984).

What are some of the reasons that working with families and the home make such a difference in children's achievement in school? Ira Gordon (1978) analyzed some of the home and family factors that influence children's learning. His analysis follows.

The first assumption that people hold is that the behavior of parents and other family members within the family influences child learning. The evidence for this is fairly widespread. It rests on longitudinal studies in England, international surveys of educational achievement, and a variety of sociological and psychological studies within the United States. In particular, there seem to be three sets of family factors which have been found to be associated with intellectual behavior and personality development (Gordon, 1969). All of these, today, may seem somewhat obvious, but they were not necessarily obvious in the early and mid-1960's when those of us attempting to institute new programs of parent involvement ran into the cynics and sceptics.

The first set are demographic factors. These are the clearest indicators from sociology, but in terms of educational program development, are the least susceptible to change. These are such variables as crowded homes, family organization, family income, ethnic background, quality of housing and social class membership.

If we turn to process variables--that is, the behavior of members toward each other--then we have two additional sets, one cognitive, and the other emotional.

The cognitive set consists of such items as the amount of academic guidance families provide for their children; the thought level and style in the home; the language level and style in the home; the use of the neighborhood and community as an educational resource, and the planning for such use; the perception of the parents that they are indeed teachers of their children, and their actual modes of direct instruction of their children; the educational aspirations they hold for them; the existence and use of external resources, such as day-care centers, nurseries, kindergartens; the intellectuality and reading press within the home, that is, not only the existence of books and magazines and newspapers, but the modeling of their use for the child; and the amount of and type of verbal interaction, not only among family members, but more particularly between adults, and infants, and young children. All homes are obviously verbal. The key element seems to be the interaction of adult and child in the language domain.

The emotional factors are represented by such items as whether or not a single adult is consistent in the management procedures used with the child, as well as the expectations held and the communication of these expectations; if there are several adults and older children in the family, whether there is consistency across these people in the way the young child is handled; the emotional security and self-esteem of the parents; their own belief in how much influence they have over their own environment and their own fate; whether or not they are protective of the infant; whether or not they are willing to devote time to the child. Here I would stress that even in single parent homes, or where both parents may be working, the ability of the family to set time aside for the child--a children's hour if you will, rather than the cocktail hour--seems to be an important factor. Other variables--such as the orderliness and routine of the family, the existence of a pattern of work habits, and a trusting attitude toward other social agencies--all seem to influence a child's intellectual development (Gordon, 1978).

More recent research (Williams, 1984) done by the Parent Involvement in Education Project at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has suggested ways in which schools might help families create home environments that enable their children to succeed in school.

Recommendations For Building Family Strengths:

- School district, building, and/or classroom parent involvement efforts need to establish program activities based on the premise that parents are [just as] important to children's academic success as educators. This will necessitate providing parents with more of a voice in all educational matters.
- Parents need to be more fully involved at all levels of the educational system so that they can: (a) strengthen the capacity of their families to establish appropriate learning environments, (b) provide meaningful home learning experiences, and (c) support/reinforce school learning activities.
- Parents should be provided with more educational information, more opportunities to share their insights/concerns, and more training, as needed, for the roles they can or wish to be involved with as a means of strengthening their ability and status as partners in the education of their children.
- Parents must be provided opportunities, through parent involvement, to interact with, be informed about, referred to, and learn how to deal with those agencies, organizations, resources or networks available in their communities. This should enhance their abilities to arrange for and/or care for family needs in a more self-sufficient and efficient manner.

(Williams, 1984, p. 13)

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Expert Sheet One: Why Parent Involvement?

As you read and study Reading One, you might wish to focus on:

1. What are some of the reasons parent involvement and participation should be encouraged by schools?

2. In what ways can parents be involved in schools?

3. What are some of the ways the family influences children's learning?

4. In what ways might schools and/or other community agencies help build family strengths in order to promote children's learning?

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Reading Two: Parent Involvement: Perceptions of Parents and Educators

Note: The "expert sheet" for this reading is at the end.

Summary of Implications and Recommendations from the results of a survey of 6,154 parents and educators of elementary school children in Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The parent sample was drawn from parents who were active in parent-teacher associations, so their particular viewpoint is represented. Excerpted from a study done by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1984.

SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION STUDY

Parent involvenent overall appears to be an acceptable kind of participation in the educational process according to most parents and educators. The results show that parents have a high degree of interest for being involved and that educators generally consider it useful to have parents involved in education. However, a closer examination of the findings reveals that educators and parents have distinctly different views about certain aspects of parent involvement. These differences represent barriers which can be deterrents to the effective involvement of parents and educators as partners in dealing with educational matters.

Educators appear to be more supportive of the traditional ways that parents have participated in children's education both at home and at school. This includes parents mainly receiving information sent home by the school, supporting or taking part in school activities prepared by school staff, and attempting to help children with their homework. On the other hand, while parents indicate a strong interest for being involved in these ways, they also are interested in participation with school goverance matters, learning more about education jointly with educators, and serving as advocates for current educational needs, issues, or concerns.

The involvement interests of parents appears to extend beyond the boundaries that educators indicate such participation would be most useful. It seems that parents and educators have dissimilar views about the meaning of parent involvement in education. Although there are some common understandings or agreements concerning certain aspects of parent involvement acceptable to both groups, parents' involvement interests appear much broader than the more narrowly defined areas of involvement which educators consider useful.

In order for parent involvement to become more acceptable, viable, and effective, a clearer definition is necessary--one which all can agree upon. Otherwise, fundamental barriers will stand in the way of successful parent involvement. Thus, it appears that there needs to be a consensus of opinions concerning the definition and scope of parent involvement efforts between parents and educators before these can become more integral to the educational system and its processes. Such concordance is a key to developing more of a

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partnership between homes and schools in dealing with the difficult issues education faces today and tomorrow.

The lack of more agreement between parents and educators regarding parent involvement's meaning appears to stem from the fact that neither group has had much formal training in the area of parent involvement. Both of the groups indicated that there is a definite need for teachers to be trained for parent involvement. It also seems that parents, other school staff, administrators, and even teacher educators would need such training for parent involvement to become most effective. Additional knowledge, understandings, skills, and experiences should enhance not only broader acceptance, but also smoother implementation of parent involvement in education.

Some of the differences in opinions about parent involvement in school governance matters may reflect a fear and/or reluctance on the part of educators (especially teachers, principals, and administrators) to share with parents these roles or activities which, historically, have been considered as the sole domain of educators. Many teachers appear to desire more of a say in educational matters or decisions. Most administrators appear unwilling to share governance because it may lessen their effectiveness and/or power. As a result, the possibilities of joint decision-making with parents will meet with resistance, because educators still appear to be neither unwilling to share control nor can they envision how this can, in practice, increase the effectiveness and relevance of education.

Based upon the more preferred ways educators want parents involved and the ways parents are most interested in being involved, there appears to be a need for change in how parent involvement is perceived. Educators should capitalize on the wider involvement interests of parents and expand the ways to increase their participation in education. Much of this will require educators to realize that many parents are far more sophisticated in their knowledge and skills than educators perceive them to be. As such, many parents can take part in more of a variety of roles. This broader and more collegial participation will necessitate attitudinal and perceptual changes on the part of educators, as well as changes in the educational system.

Parent involvement cannot be effective if educators continue to see it as an attachment or a supplement to mainstream educational activities. Rather, such involvement must be incorporated into the mainstream of education. The results suggest at least three steps to accomplish this. First, a clear, definitive statement about parent involvement must be developed and issued to all in a school system. Second, viable, written policies to help frame and implement parent involvement efforts must be established. Third, both staff and financial resources to carry out parent involvement activities need to be identified, then earmarked for such usage. In doing so, the importance of parent involvement in education will be more evident from the perspectives of educators and parents alike.

The extent to which parent involvement can be improved appears to be directly related also to how "open" educators are to this concept. In addition, developing a broader range of parent involvement activities that are amenable to parents' needs is a most important aspect of revitalizing their participation. Although parents will participate in slightly different ways, this should not deter educators from working with them to jointly develop the framework and components of an effective involvement program. Ultimately, educators will have to realize that the most effective parent involvement program, similar to the most viable educational program, must be extended to the entire school community rather than being limited to the school building.

Parent involvement should be perceived by educators and parents as a more encompassing concept. To do this, it appears that parent involvement may need to be framed within the concept of at least four broad domain areas. These would include: (a) public relations; (b) school support/learning; (c) home support/learning; and (d) shared governance. In doing so, parent involvement can become a catalyst, not only for parents to influence as well as fully participate in the educational system, but also to help them effectively use community resources to aid in making family life, as well as educational achievement, more satisfying and successful.

The results from this study led the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory to make the following recommendations:

1. For Teacher Training:

- Parent involvement should be taught in a developmental sequence that progresses from the more traditional types of parent involvement where parents are asked to cooperate with school staff, to the types of parent involvement in which school staff provide services to parents, and then toward the types where parents and school staff work together essentially as partners in education.

- Inservice training also should begin with a developmental framework for teachers to look at the various models of parent involvement. Our results indicate that most teachers, administrators, and parents support the role of parents as audience, but there are also significant numbers in each group favoring the models in which parents and school staff function as partners in the educational process. Therefore, involving parents as audience is a good first step, but in a given district the relationship between parents and the school may already be much more developed.

- Inservice training also should focus on enhancing teachers' attitudes and their motivations for working more collegially with parents. Once this is established, training should move on to knowledge, and then to actual development of requisite skills. This sequence of training suggests that inservice training for parent involvement should consist of a series of workshops rather than a one-day, one-time workshop.

2. For Improving Parent Involvement in Schools:

- Principals and other administrators must be included in parent involvement training as they often set the rules and norms in the schools. If they are not aware of the benefits of parent involvement, or not skilled in working with parents, they may set norms for teachers that discourage them from using the skills or knowledge they have acquired regarding parent involvement.

- To encourage all school staff in school districts to develop better relations with parents, formal district policies need to be written that clearly spell out the commitment to parent involvement. Responses from our superintendents' and school board presidents' surveys indicate that existence of formal written policies encouraging parent involvement activities in schools is directly related to increased levels of a variety of parent involvement activities in schools.

- In designing school district parent involvement programs, the various types of parent involvement must be viewed as a developmental sequence, from the teachers' and the parents' point of view. Increasing parent involvement in the role of audience requires comparatively less effort and skill on the part of both teachers and parents than would parent involvement as home tutors. Therefore, interests, skill levels, and estimates of available time, especially on the part of parents, must be considered when deciding which types of parent involvement are to be the focus of program efforts.

Expert Sheet Two: Parent Involvement: Peceptions of Parents and Educators

1. In what ways do parents and educators of elementary school differ in their views of parent involvement in education?

2. How might those differences be narrowed?

3. What is meant by a "development sequence" in parent involvement, and what would be the advantages to schools and parents of viewing parent involvement that way?

4. In what ways can administrators and board members influence the way other school personnel work with parents?

Reading Three: The Modern Dilemma of School-Home Communications:

Note: The "expert sheet" for this reading is at the end.

Part I — An Introduction and Overview

Edward E. Gotts and Richard F. Purnell

Two general alarms are frequently encountered today in both the popular and professional media. These concern: (1) the need to improve various American educational practices and (2) the wrenchingly changing American family. However, seldom do we see or hear about the typical day-to-day interactions of these two significantly changing institutions. Nevertheless, the truth is that in our society the family and the school are intimately bound to one another. Consequently, there is a widespread consensus among close observers that the individual shiftings and shake-outs of home and school are sending disturbing shock waves through their respective cores, through each other, and through the society at large. Thus, if educational architects are to have a say in bringing about more than just an "exasperating tolerance" between the school and the home, attention must be given to the dynamic and changing interplay between these two significant influences in the development of our children. Ideally, ways must be found to make their emerging relationship a collaborative one that strengthens both.

As it happens, one of the few places in the country that has been giving concentrated attention to practice in this important area is the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) in Charleston, West Virginia. In fact, since 1980, staff at AEL, together with collaborators from local schools, West Virginia University, and the University of Rhode Island have been doing work in the area of school-home communications as part of a larger school-family relations project. More specifically, we have carefully examined the nature of this problem, developed ways of studying and dealing with it, and applied those ways to school systems in West Virginia. This report is about the work that the first author has done in this area; it will appear in two installments. This first installment introduces and gives an overview of the school-home communications dilemma. The next installment outlines our proposed way out of the dilemma and briefly presents some of the results that have been obtained through applying that approach in Kanawha County and other West Virginia high schools.

To begin with communication takes place when a message is received as intended by its sender. School-home communications is a label that we selected to include both messages sent by the school to the home and vice versa. Distinguishing the latter from the former when desirable may be achieved by rearranging the order of words to: home-school communications. Moreover, although other forms of interactive communications occur and are possible, school-home communications take two major forms: (1) Individual (Type I) and (2) School-wide (Type S). Examples of Type I are messages about the child's academic progress, attendance, and interest, whereas examples of Type S are PTA/PTO announcements, newsletters, notices of conference times, and discipline codes.

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Numerous observers--both futurists and contemporary commentators--have strongly suggested that schools need to reexamine their style of communicating with the home regarding Type I and S matters. The language of these observers describes schools and homes as being "worlds apart"; schools using obsolete parent-excluding techniques; and schools depending on "one-way," "top-down," authoritarian communicating styles; these expressions typify the landscape of their writings. Answers that these commentators offer on the topic dwell on "two-way," "mutually-exchanging," "partnership" styles of communicating by schools. The name of the game, one of them says, "is people interacting with other people."

The prize to be realized by moving from a model of communicating "to" to one of "with" the home will be greater and more constructive parental involvement. In this connection we must note that the parent involvement literature of the past 20 years yields two consistent findings: 1) student achievement goes up and 2) support for schools grows with increased parent involvement at all grade levels.

The dilemma is that the present dominant model of school-home communication alienates many parents. Sugar coated or disguised efforts to continue more of the same, no matter how well intentioned, are likely to make matters worse in the present climate with its cross-currents of change. A fresh approach that is consistent with the demands of the new wave for more partnership-types of relationships appears to be what is called for.

A description of and rationale for the approach developed by AEL, along with a report of some of their findings in Kanawha County high schools, will be presented in the next installment of this article.

For more discussion of the world into which we are moving, see Naisbitt, J., Megatrends--Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives. New York: Warner Books, 1982; and Toffler, A. The Third Wave. New York: Bantam Books, 1980.

Part II -- A Way Out and Some Results

The first installments of this report introduced and gave an overview of the school-home communications dilemma. This one outlines our proposed way out of the dilemma and briefly presents some of the results that have been obtained through applying that approach in Kanawha County and other West Virginia high schools.

The dilemma is that we know that a greater-than-present level of parent involvement is a highly desirable quest for educators to puruse but that the present dominant model of school-home communication alienates many parents. The way out of this is to begin by using the partnership style of communicating that is more consistent with the demands of the emerging information society. Our view is that schools can and should find out how to provide for these more effective communications by asking the parents themselves--that is, through home-to-school communications!

More specifically, we advocate the use of telephone interviews with parents (by volunteers) to find out what they are thinking about the frequency, contents, methods, and effectiveness of school-to-home communications. These would yield far greater returns than paper-and-pencil questionnaires--in fact, polling has shown that 95 percent or more of all parents contacted agreed to a brief interview.

Working through AEL with school principals, Gotts collaboratively applied the idea of using telephone interviews to learn from parents about school-home communications in one larger and three small (more rural) West Virginia county school systems during 1982. Although this technique was also applied in elementary schools, only secondary school results are reported here because: (1) more information is generally available on early childhood practices, and (2) communication-linked bottlenecks are more pressing than with the age group in the secondary schools of our society.

The interview required 15-20 minutes to administer and was given to a random sample of families of about equal numbers of 10th, 11th, and 12th grade boys and girls. It sought to document: (1) actual school-home communication practices as experienced by parents, (2) their reactions to these, (3) suggestions for improved practices, and (4) parents' views of what might work at the secondary level.*

Final sampling figures for the three smaller counties' (S) schools combined and the four larger city (L) schools combined were 184 and 198, respectively. The bulk of the parent respondents were mothers in both samples (S = 97.83%; L = 87.37%). Neither child's sex or grade level was found to be associated with parent orientation toward school-home communications in two of the largest schools sampled. Thus, all subsequent analyses were conducted without regard to these variables.

To begin with, majorities of the two groups of parents attend some school function (S = 76.09%; L = 69.19%). Athletic events (S and L = 60%) attract far more parents than do other events, e.g., Band/Music (next highest at 18%), Drama, P-T functions, community education, etc. In contrast, although both groups have parent meetings and councils, overwhelmingly parents do not attend these (S = 86.96%; L = 80.81%).

In response to a series of questions about communications received from the school, more L-school (95.41%) parents mention receiving them (S = 69.40%). Of those who receive them, newsletters are most often mentioned by L-school parents (L= 81.51%; S = 2.72%), while special notices are mentioned more frequently by S-school parents (S= 38.04%; L = 18.18%).

The frequency of receiving communications from one to four times every 6-8 weeks is reported to be significantly greater at L-schools (63.48%) than at S-schools (27.07%). However, L-school parents (52.03%) appreciably more often see school-home communications as being equated with problems (S = 37.93%) and more often have negative attitudes toward such contacts (L = 13.64%; S = 4.49%). They also more often feel responsible for making school contacts (L = 73.40%; S = 36.88%).

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*A technical report containing sample interviews and coding procedures is available from AEL.

When notified by the school that their child is performing "below expectations" some parents say they do not take any action (S = 7.14%; L = 19.85%) and 39.25 percent L-parents but 61.54 percent S-parents say they talk to their child's teacher about the matter. On the other hand, virtually no parent said he or she would not want to hear about a problem the child was having in school, although some wanted to know about only certain things and others (a majority in L and S schools) wanted to know everything.

Many parents (S = 71.20%; L = 53.54%) mention a need to receive prompt notice about problems, but few mention encouraging responsibility for behavior in their child (S = 2.72%; L = 14.14%). S-school parents more often feel the school needs more discipline (S = 36.96%; L = 19.19%) but infrequently feel that parents can do more than the school (S = 6.52%; L = 19.19%). Finally, majorities of both groups of parents say that school and home should work together on problems (S = 82.07%; L = 66.67%).

These findings reflect the responses to questions about school-home communication issues identified jointly by the principals and AEL staff. When presented with these and responses to more open-ended questions, principals were inclined spontaneously to generate plans for using them to improve their school's effectiveness in practicing school-home communications.

HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Edward E. Gotts

Parent involvement of almost every imaginable type has been tried out over the past 20 years. There are two consistent findings from studies of these involvement efforts. When parent involvement increases, (1) student achievement goes up and (2) support grows for schools. These findings appear in studies of all grade levels.

Some parents create their own involvement, without receiving any special help from schools. For the average parent, however, schools can succeed in greatly increasing involvement. The first step toward this result is to have effective home-school communications.

Our research has identified a number of areas for home-school communications regarding individual students: academic progress, attendance, homework assignments, classroom conduct, special needs that are identified, progress toward graduation, career and other post-secondary planning, interest, and motivation. Communications are also needed about the overall school program: PTA/PTO, scheduled parent-teacher conference times, curriculum emphasis, expectations and standards for conduct, discipline code, grading and attendance policies, extracurricular programs and events, opportunities for volunteer service, special circumstances facing local schools--the list goes on.

The two lists above suggest two types of communication efforts that are needed: (1) home and school need to arrange ways to consider together the progress and needs of individual students; and (2) schools need to share information with all parents in a timely manner about their program, activity schedule, accomplishments, and needs.

Two methods have been especially successful for communications of the second type, that is, for all parents. These are newsletters and open house at the school. Open house draws in elementary parents a little more rapidly, but works at the secondary level as well. The newsletter is highly accepted at both levels.

Open house works best if: (a) held perhaps once a year, (b) at a time of low schedule conflict, and (c) with much advance planning, preparation, and publicity (the three P's). Parents at both elementary and secondary levels are more likely to attend open house if: (a) their child is featured in some way, (b) there will be an opportunity to examine student work and talk with teachers, (c) time is convenient, (d) notice is given far in advance, (e) they receive a personal welcome or invitation, (f) they expect to experience a cordial atmosphere, including refreshments, (g) the open house has a stated purpose the parents consider personally important, and (h) they have been involved in some way in the planning.

The newsletter is a more general purpose means of communication. Our studies show that a quality newsletter is the single most effective way of reaching parents whose children attend an individual school building. It feels very personal to hear from "my child's school." The evidence shows that a large majority of parents read and act upon information provided in newsletters. They are upset if news of school events comes too late. One helpful principle, in preparing the newsletter, is to emphasize upcoming events with a brief but comprehensive calendar on the cover page. The more informative the newsletter, the more positive its reception. News development should, however, be brief and pointed. Personal messages and viewpoints from school personnel are welcomed.

Open house and newsletters can set the tone for all other home-school communications. They lead into the more personal forms of communication. They invite parent involvement. These more personal forms of communication are discussed in the following section.

Personalized Individual Home-School Communications

Personalized home-school communications can be started by doing brief interviews with parents to find out what they are thinking. Do they receive communications as often as they would like? What else do they want the school to communicate? What can be done to make the school's existing channels of communication work more effectively? An interview is far more effective than a questionnaire for answering these questions. Interviews of this type can be conducted by PTA/PTO members or other parent volunteers. Our experience is that 95 percent or more of all parents contacted agreed to participate in a brief interview. Moreover, their answers can be analyzed and used by school personnel, with little outside assistance, to improve communications. We are available to assist schools that plan to carry out interviews of this type.

Next, personalized communications about individual children need to be initiated by school personnel rather than parents. This is so because parents seldom know whether a child is having difficulty or needs additional help. The teacher is the one who usually spots this kind of thing first.

Teachers find it easier to initiate communications about student difficulties if there are policies or guidelines that lead parents, teachers, and students to expect such communications. Policies or guidelines of this type need to be developed thoughtfully by a school district committee. They should be officially adopted by school board action.

Based on our studies of exemplary practices in local school systems, we can recommend that the following personalized communications and follow-up practices be considered.

1. Parents should be notified of any student academic difficulty about mid-way through a grading period. This allows time for improvement before the grade appears on a report card. Parents also need guidance on how to follow up on academic deficiency reports. We have prepared a single-page guidance sheet to accompany these "interim grade reports," and can make it available to interested school systems.

2. Parents should be contacted about most student conduct problems that are serious enough to require even mild disciplinary action. Prevention of further incidents is

the reason for communicating promptly. Overwhelmingly, parents indicate they wish to be notified. Parents of secondary school students are especially keen about receiving prompt notification. Teachers and counselors more often risk being wrong, in the thinking of parents, when they fail to notify parents than they do when they communicate about behavior problems. Clearly, it is easier to do this when reporting is an expected procedure. Exceptions to this rule should, of course, be allowed under special circumstances, such as when a further strained parent-child relationship might offset the benefits.

3. Prompt and regular notification of student absence is best accomplished by telephone message whenever possible. Policy in this area should encourage parents to call the school first whenever they know the student will be absent.

4. Many parents indicate their willingness to review and acknowledge by signature their students' school work. This arrangement works well when the flow of communication is fully predictable, as when it is understood that this will be a daily or weekly transaction. These arrangements are best made by agreement between teacher and parent for a specified length of time.

5. If parents are to be asked to help with or supervise completion of homework, this must be clearly communicated. In this event, parents should be offered instruction and support before they undertake this assignment. Parents and teacher will need to confer from time to time with each other and the student about the process. By following this pattern, more predictable results will be achieved when homework is assigned.

Expert Sheet Three: The Modern Dilemma of School-Home Communications

1. In what ways do many school-home communications alienate parents? Note: Add your own examples to those in the article.

2. Distinguish between and think of as many examples as you can of "Individual" messages and "School-wide" messages.

3. In what ways did parents of larger and smaller secondary schools differ from each other in their of home-school communications? In what ways were they alike?

4. In what ways did children's sex and grade level influence parents' perceptions of home-school communications?

5. What are some ways to make personalized home-school communications effective? School-wide communications?

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Reading Four: Single Parents and the Schools: The Effect of Marital Status on Parent and Teacher Evaluations.

Note: The "expert sheet" for this reading is at the end.

ABSTRACT

The single-parent home is one of the major living arrangements of school children today. This paper uses data from a survey of 1,269 parents, including 24 percent single parents, to study whether single and married parents differ in their interactions with elementary schools and teachers.

Results show that initial differences between single and married parents' perceptions of teachers and teachers' evaluations of single and married parents are due to other family and school conditions. Race, parent education, grade level, teacher practices of parent involvement, and overall teacher quality significantly influence parent reports of teacher practices. Children's performance and behavior, teacher practices of parent involvement, and grade level significantly influence teacher evaluations of parent helpfulness at home. Children's achievement and behavior are the main influences on teacher evaluations of the quality of children's homework, but some teachers rate children from single-parent homes lower than other children, even after classroom achievement is taken into account.

Single parents felt more pressure than married parents to be involved with their children in learning activities at home. Married parents spent more time assisting teachers at school. Both groups of parents were concerned about their children's education, worked with their children at home when there were questions about school work, and were generally positive about their children's elementary schools and teachers.

The study shows the importance of measures of school structures and processes in research on single parents. Single parents had better relations with teachers whose philosophy and practices lead them toward more positive attitudes about parents. Single parents reported different treatment from married parents when their children were in the classrooms of teachers who were not leaders in the use of parent involvement, and single parents and their children were viewed less positively by teachers who did not frequently involve parents in learning activities at home. Teacher leadership, not parent marital status, influenced parent awareness, appreciation of teachers' efforts, and knowledge about the school program. These findings required proximate measures of teacher practices that were linked directly to the students and their parents.

Excerpts from the report follow: The one-parent home is one of the major family arrangements of school children today. Over thirteen million children live in single-parent homes, most in mother-only homes and most as a result of separation or divorce. Each year about 2 million children under the age of 18 have parents who divorce. Between 1970 and 1982 there was a 67 percent increase in the number of children living with one parent. In the United States in 1982, 22 percent of the households with children--about 1 in 5--were single-parent homes. Membership in one-parent homes is even greater for black children, with 49 percent of the children under 18 years old in one-parent

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homes (U.S. Census, 1982). It is estimated that from 40 percent to 50 percent of all school-age children will spend some of their school years as part of a one-parent home (Furstenburg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983; Garbarino, 1982; Glick, 1979; Masnick & Bane, 1980; Svanum, Bringle, & McLaughlin, 1982).

In earlier times, single-parent homes were atypical; now they are common. The historic contrast raises many ideological and emotional questions about the effects of single-parent homes on the members of the family. Although much has been written about single parents, their children, their numbers, and their problems, little research has focused on how single parents and their children fit into other social institutions that were designed to serve traditional families. Yet, when single or married parents have children in school, the family and school are inexorably linked.

Researchers from different disciplines have recognized the importance of understanding how institutions simultaneously affect human development. Litwak & Meyer, 1974, described clearly the potential for cooperation between schools (bureaucratic organizations) and families (primary groups). Coleman, 1974, discussed how individuals struggle with "corporate actors" to establish a balance of power between individuals and the organizations that serve them. Bronfenbrenner, 1979, explicitly called for research on how the interactions of simultaneously socializing environments affect individuals. Others, too (Dokecki & Maroney, 1983; Leichter, 1974; Schafer, 1983) have called for research on the family as part of the wider social system. In this paper we examine some connections between families and schools, looking especially at single parents, their children, and their children's teachers.

Opinions differ as to whether schools and teachers should be informed about parents' marital status or changes in family structure. Some argue that teachers are biased against children from one-parent homes. They suggest that teachers negatively label children of divorced or separated parents, explain children's school problems in terms of the family living arrangement rather than in terms of teacher practices or individual needs, or assume parental inadequacies before the facts about parents' skills are known (Laosa, 1983; Lightfoot, 1978; Ogbu, 1974; Santrock & Tracy, 1978; Zill, 1983). Others argue that the school should be informed about parental separation or divorce because the teacher provides stability and support to children during the initial period of family disruption, can be more sensitive to children's situations when discussing families, and can organize special services such as after-school care that may be needed by single parents and working mothers. These discrepant opinions are each supported by parents' accounts of experiences with teacher bias or with teacher understanding and assistance (Carew & Lightfoot, 1979; Keniston, 1977; National Public Radio, 1980; Snow, 1982). There are few facts from research, however, about whether and how teacher practices are influenced by their students' family structures or about how single parents perceive or react to public schools and their children's teachers.

This report focuses on the children's living arrangements that affect the day-to-day communications and interactions of the family and the school. We describe the characteristics of single and married parents and present correlates of marital status. We introduce a simple model that improves upon earlier research on the effects of marital status, parent education, and teacher leadership on parent-teacher exchanges and evaluations. We compare single and married parents' reports of the frequency of teacher requests for parent involvement. Then we look at teachers' reports of the quality of assistance from single and married parents and the quality of the homework completed by children from one- and two-parent homes. Finally, we introduce an explanatory model that places marital status in a fuller social context.

The research takes into account measures of family structure and processes, student characteristics, and school structures and processes, including family size, race, parent education, occupational status; student grade level, ability, behavior in class; teacher leadership in parent involvement, experience, overall quality; and other teacher-parent interactions. Unlike earlier research that often used "special problem" samples to study single-parent families (Shinn, 1978), this sample is derived from a state-wide sample of teachers in regular school settings. Most importantly, the data from teachers, parents, and students were directly linked, so that effects of teacher practices on parents could be estimated (Epstein, 1983). This means that parents were identified whose children were in particular teachers' classrooms, and that other proximate measures of family and school conditions could be taken into account in estimating effects on parents' and teachers' appraisals of each other's efforts.

Data and Approach

Surveys of teachers, principals, parents, and students in 16 Maryland school districts were conducted in 1980 and 1981. About 3,700 first, third, and fifth grade teachers and their principals in 600 schools were surveyed (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Becker, 1982. From the original sample 36 teachers were identified who strongly emphasized parent involvement in learning activities at home. Then, 46 "control" teachers were selected who were similar to the case teachers in grade level, type of school district, years of teaching experience, and school population, but who did not emphasize parent involvement in their teaching practice. Among the case teachers, 17 were confirmed by their principals as strong leaders in the use of parent involvement activities. In 11, then, the 82 teachers ranged along a...continuum of use of parent involvement, with the "confirmed leaders" making the most frequent use of the greatest number of learning activities at home.

After extensive data collection on a number of variables related to family characteristics, and school and family practices, followed by careful statistical analysis, Epstein (1984) reached the following conclusions:

Researchers have contributed three types of information on single parents. First, descriptive reports offer statistics about single parents and their children. Many reports have focused on the dramatic increase in the prevalence of single parents, the number of children in single-parent homes, racial differences in marital patterns, and the economic disparities of single vs. two parent homes, especially single-mother home vs. other family arrangements (Bane, 1976; Cherlin, 1982). It is important to document and monitor the trends in separation, divorce, the numbers of children affected, and the emergence and increase of special cases such as teenage single-parents (Mott Foundation, 1981), and never married parents (U.S. Census, 1982).

Second, specific, analytic studies of the effects of family structure on children or parents go beyond descriptive statistics to consider family conditions and processes that affect family members. Research of this type measures a range of family-life variables--such as socioeconomic status, family history, family practices, and attitudes such as parental commitment to their children (Adams, 1982; Bane, 1976; Furstenburg, Nord, Peterson, Zill, 1983; Svanum, Bringle & McLaughlin, 1982; Zill, 1983). These studies increase our understanding of the dynamics of family life under different social and economic conditions.

Third, integrative, analytic studies of the effects of family structure on children and parents go beyond the boundaries of family conditions to include other institutions that affect family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Leichter, 1974; Litwak & Meyers, 1974; Santrock & Tracy, 1978). In this paper we see that the effects of family structure are, in fact, attributable to variables that characterize school and classroom organizations. During the years when families have school-age children, the interplay of families and schools is a critical part of studies of family structure. The current study contributes new knowledge based on data from parents and teachers about family structure and the schools:

1. Single parents are not a single group. The diversity in single-parent homes means that an understanding of families is incomplete if it is based only on the simple category of marital status. In this statewide survey, single parents varied in education, family size, family resources, occupational status, confidence in ability to help their children, and other family practices that concern their children. Single parents' reports suggest that they fulfill their parenting role with about the same level of interaction with and concern for their children as do married parents. Some characteristics may differ in one- and two-parent homes, such as the amount of adult time available per child (where there is more than one child), and parent time available to assist at the school. Indeed, the single parents felt they had had less time and energy than needed to complete the teachers' requests for learning activities at home, and they spent significantly fewer days helping at school than did married parents. But these differences do not seem to affect the basic interactions of families with the elementary schools. There is some evidence that marital status affects teacher ratings of children's homework completion, even after children's classroom achievement is taken into account. Future reports will be devoted to the effects on students of teacher practices of parent involvement, and special attention will be given to children from single-parent homes.

2. There is diversity in teacher practices that concern families. Some teachers' philosophies and practices lead them toward more positive attitudes about parents and about how parents can share the teacher's role by assisting their children at home. Teachers who were not leaders in the use of organized and frequent parent involvement practices had lower opinions of the quality of help received from single parents than from married parents, and lower opinions of

parents in general than did leaders in the use of parent involvement. Santrock and Tracy, 1978, found that teachers rated hypothetical children from two-parent homes higher on positive traits and lower on negative traits than children from one-parent homes. In actual school settings, we found that teachers differed in their evaluations of children from one- and two-parent homes. Teachers tended to rate children from one-parent homes lower on the quality of their homework, and teachers who were not leaders made greater distinctions between children from one- and two-parent homes that were otherwise equal in parent education.

3. Teacher leadership, not parent marital status, influenced parent awareness and appreciation of teachers' efforts and knowledge about the school program. Single and married parents whose children were in the classrooms of teachers who were leaders in parent involvement were more aware of teacher efforts, improved their understanding of the school program, and rated teacher interpersonal and teaching skills higher than did parents of children in classrooms of teachers who were not leaders in the frequent use of parent involvement. Parents' day-to-day experiences with learning activities at home, and teachers' responsiveness to children and their families—not marital status—were the important influences on whether parents knew more about their role in their child's education.

4. Research on single parents and their children must include measures of family and school structures and processes that affect the interactions of parents, teachers, and students. Without measures of the teachers' organization of school and classroom activities that affect children's activities at home, and without measures of student achievements and behaviors that affect how teachers view students and their parents, marital status would look like a more important influence on parents and teachers than it really is. In this paper, full consideration of family and school factors altered conclusions about the importance of family structure on parents and teachers evaluations of each other, and documented important connections between the two institutions and their members.

Single parents and the schools. Single parents felt more pressure than did married parents to assist their children at home, spent more time on home-learning activities, but still felt that they did not always have enough time and energy to do what was expected by the teacher. Overall, single parents had better relations with teachers who were leaders in the use of learning activities at home than with teachers who did not emphasize parent involvement.

The schools and single parents. Although family members may recover relatively rapidly from the disruption caused by divorce or separation (Bane, 1976; Hetherington, Cox & Cox,

> 1978; Zill, 1983), others, whose attitudes favor traditional families, may have difficulty dealing with families who differ from the norm. Our analyses show that teachers who were _not leaders_ in parent involvement rated single and low-educated parents significantly lower than married parents in helpfulness even after parent education, parent involvement at the school, the child's classroom achievement, and other important variables are taken into account. However, teachers who were _leaders_ and who organized active programs of parent involvement were more positive about the quality of assistance received from all parents, including single parents and parents with little formal education.

The teacher's leadership in the frequent use of parent involvement is a statement by the teacher about the continuous and important role parents play in their children's education. The formal organization of parent involvement in the teacher's regular teaching practice may be especially important for a single parent whose family situation makes involvement in school activities difficult.

(From Joyce L. Epstein, 1984. Single parents and the schools: The Effect of Marital Status on Parent and Teacher Evaluation. Report No. 353, Baltimore, Maryland: Center for Social Organization of Schools, The Johns Hopkins University. A full description of data collection and analysis and the references cited may be found in the report.)

Expert Sheet Four: Single Parents and the Schools: The Effect of Marital Status on Parent and Teacher Evaluations.

1. In this survey of teachers and parents, what factors influenced differences in interactions between single and married parents and schools? What did the research conclude was the most important factor?

2. Explain the significance of the one-parent home in today's society, and schools in particular.

3. Explain the conclusion: "Single parents are not a single group."

4. Explain the conclusion: "There is diversity in teacher practices that concern families."

Jigsaw Quiz: School-Family Relations: What We Know

Short Answer

1. Parents and educators have different perceptions of what parent involvement and participation is and should be. List four things educators could do to help parents and educators come closer to agreeing.

   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

2. You've been asked by a colleague why you are interested in working with parents, since it doesn't seem to her/him that parents are very interested. Briefly list at least four reasons.

   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

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3. List three implications for educators of the increasing number of one-parent homes.

   a.

   b.

   c.

Multiple Choice: Put the letter of the best response on the line.

____ 4. Parents of secondary school students (10, 11, 12 grade) differed in their perceptions of home-school communications depending on:

   a. the age/grade level of their children

   b. whether they lived in rural or urban communities

   c. the sex of the children

   d. the structure of the home (single-parent, both working away from home, etc.)

____ 5. If schools and homes were making a beginning effort to work more closely with each other, the best way to start would probably be:

   a. shared goverance

   b. training parents to be tutors of their own children

   c. more effective home-school communications and public relations

   d. training parents to work as volunteers at school

____ 6. In the study of single parents and the schools, single parents reported:

   a. better relations with teachers who were leaders in parent involvement

   b. spent less time than married parents on home-learning activities

c. felt little or no obligation to help their children with school work, since that was the school's job

d. had better relations with teachers who did not expect parent help

____ 7. Family "process" variables that influence children's learning:

a. refer to income, ethnic background, housing, family structure, etc.

b. can sometimes be changed so that they support children's learning

c. cannot be changed

d. are restricted to cognitive and school-related teachings

School-Family Communications: In Plain Words

To The Leader:

It is not enough to tell people they should avoid using "big words" and "professional jargon" in talking with parents. Many specialists, teachers, and administrators have learned concepts such as "norm," "I.Q.," and "auditory memory" in technical language, and find it difficult to explain those concepts in plain words. This short inservice should be fun, heighten teachers' awareness of the technical terms they use, and give them practice in "translation."

The work will be done in heterogeneous teams, so that participants have to depend on each other. For example, specialists in learning disabilities, special ed, or speech should be dispersed throughout the teams. If the group has both secondary and elementary teachers, mix them up, and make sure the list of words to be put in "plain words" contains terms specific to each group. If you don't know the participants ahead of time, mix them up by having all specialists hold up their hands, then move so they are dispersed. Continue until everyone is assigned to a team.

Prizes for each team are optional, but fun. Make them insignificant, such as paper party hats, stickers, paper flowers to wear, small shiny rocks from the mountains, smooth pebbles from a stream, or plastic bookmarks.

Objective: Participants can "translate" frequently used technical school terms into written non-technical terms.

Materials: Lists or examples of frequently used school "jargon" or technical terms that non-school people are likely to misunderstand. If you have trouble thinking of some, ask some parents! Duplicate enough of these for each participant to have one. Some should be short paragraphs, if possible. Use those most frequently used in your school district--every district has its own jargon--as well as those shared with other school people. Leave enough space beside or below each one for people to write their "translation." To settle any arguments, have a glossary of educational and psychological terms handy.

Optional: Prizes for each group

Procedures:

Erma Bombeck, in her own inimitable way, has summarized the feelings of many parents in working with schools. She wrote:

When my son, Bruce, entered the first grade, his report card said, "He verbalizes during class and periodically engages in excursions up and down the aisles."

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In the sixth grade, his teacher said, "What can we do with a child who does not relate to social interaction?" (I ran home and got out my dictionary.)

At the start of his senior year, Bruce's adviser said, "This year will hopefully open up options for your son so he can realize his potential and aim for tangible goals."

On my way out, I asked the secretary, "Do you speak English?" (She nodded.) "What was she telling me?"

"Bruce is goofing off," the secretary said flatly.

I don't know if education is helping Bruce or not, but it's certainly improving my vocabulary!

(From "AT WIT'S END" by Erma Bombeck. Compright, 1978 Field Enterprises, Inc. Courtesy of Field Newspaper Syndicate.)

Many of us understand and get used to using technical terms and school "jargon" as a quick and easy way to communicate among ourselves. But other people, especially parents and community people sometimes don't understand what we mean by "percentiles," "norms," "psychological inventories," and other terms. To communicate, we have to translate them into "plain words." Sometimes that even helps us clarify to ourselves what those terms mean.

Today you're going to work as teams. I'll distribute examples of typical professional jargon we often use. Working together, decide what your team thinks is the best way to say that in plain, everyday language. Write down the "translation" you agree on.

You'll have ____________ minutes to work.

Vary the time allowed according to the number and difficulty of the examples.

If you get through early, think of some other jargon we sometimes use to throw up "smoke screens" or because we just don't think. Remember, work as a team, because you're going to report as a team.

Distribute the examples you've compiled. Check for understanding. Have the groups begin. Monitor to make sure they understand the task and work as a team. If a group finishes early, remind them to list other terms and put them in plain words.

Time's up!! Now let's go through the list and decide the best translation into plain language. Each group will report what they decided about a word or term, then we'll decide which translation is "best."

> **Let each team report on each term, sentence, or paragraph, then take a vote on the most appropriate translation. Continue to the end, discussing as indicated. No need to tell a team their definition is "wrong." Usually the group process does that.**
>
> **Let any group that finished early share the additional terms they listed and their translations.**

When we know the everyday language for these terms, why do we use them so much, especially with parents?

> **Discuss possible reasons. These should include:**

- **Need to show we're "professional"**
- **Uncertainty about what the terms actually mean and how to explain to someone else**
- **Don't think; assume everyone else knows**
- **Don't really want parent to understand**

You've had some practice translating into written plain language. Remember, it's going to be hard to transfer that to talking with a parent in the classroom. Try practicing "plain language" on your fellow teachers and other school personnel. You might even understand each other better, and that will help prepare you to talk with parents.

Some schools have worked with parents to "translate" the meaning of grades and terms used on children's progress reports or report cards. They have specified what "Needs Improvement" means at that school. They have clear, simple explanations of the various special programs, such as Chapter I. A good idea!

Now, I've got a prize for each team.

> **Distribute prizes—make them not for "the best," but for other things. Certainly the team that wrote down the most technical jargon should have one for "knowing the most jargon." Other possibilities are "loudest team," "team that laughed the most," "team that worked steadiest," "quietest," and so forth.**
>
> **Dismiss group by saying:**

This congregated conference for professional development and renewal is now concluded and adjourned. In plain words: the inservice is over.

Followup:

Since I won't be able to be with you when you talk to parents, I want you to listen to yourself. Every time you use a word or term they are unlikely to understand, write it down. At one of our future meetings, we'll share these demons.

Listen With Your Mind and Heart (Two Sessions)

To The Leader:

This activity is designed to help teachers, principals, and other specialists improve their ability to understand and to check their understanding by restating what the speaker has said. The procedure combines four methods of learning and teaching: (1) demonstration, (2) role-taking and playing to provide (3) practice, and (4) coaching. After the introductory material, divide the participants into groups of three. In each practice session:

- one participant plays the role of a parent telling a teacher, specialist, or principal something about a child;
- one participant practices active, reflective listening; and
- one participant coaches the participant who is practicing.

Then they switch roles. In the procedures section, we will give more examples and an explanation of what each of these methods requires of the participants.

The first training session will focus on listening for and understanding facts; the second will focus on listening for and understanding emotions that the speaker is also communicating.

Remember, feel free to "ad lib" on the script. Just make sure the essential points are covered. For example, if participants seem somewhat unmotivated, discuss what it feels like to talk to someone who is only half-listening, encouraging them to contribute their own experiences and feelings.

You'll need a room large enough that the trios can form small groups and talk without the distraction of another group uncomfortably close.

Listen With Your Mind and Heart

First Training Session

Objective: Participants will restate a factual account to the satisfaction of the person talking.

Materials:

1. Chalkboard, flip chart, or overhead projector and transparencies.
2. Index cards. Fold the cards in half lengthwise, so they will stand up. Print "parent," "listener," "coach" on enough sets of 3 so that each trio will have a set.
3. Marking pens for printing the cards.
4. One copy of Handout VI-6, "As Others See Us," for each participant.

The handout is reproduced on the next page for your reference. The copy in Appendix E can be removed and reproduced.

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Handout VI-6

"As Others See Us"

Grade Yourself as a Listener

We often speak of "listening skills" as if we either did or didn't have them. The truth is that we listen to different people in different circumstances in different ways. Since we as teachers often grade children on their ability to listen, let's turn the tables and pretend that other people are grading us. Circle the grade that you think the person on the left would give you on your ability to listen.

Rater	Grade					Comments
Best friend	A	B	C	D	F	
President of school board	A	B	C	D	F	
Children you teach	A	B	C	D	F	
Your own children	A	B	C	D	F	
Your spouse or parents	A	B	C	D	F	
Parents of the children you teach	A	B	C	D	F	
Principal during teacher's meeting	A	B	C	D	F	
Superintendent in a one-to-one conversation	A	B	C	D	F	

If there are differences, what might be some of the reasons?

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Procedure:

One of the ways to show parents that we respect them and value what they say is to listen to them. Well, of course, we all listen to parents and other people who talk with us—but do we?

Researchers estimate that most of us operate about 25 percent listening efficiency. That's pretty low when you consider that listening is the most frequently used form of communication. Most of us listen more than we read, talk, or write.

How well does each of us do? The answer may depend on who we ask.

Just for fun, let's grade ourselves on our listening skills "as others see us."

> **Distribute Handout VI-6. Remind people to be honest in their grading. Mark your own grade as they work.**

So what does your "report card" look like?

> **Discuss, emphasizing difference in grades. Contribute some of your own to help establish rapport and join in the fun.**

What are some of the reasons we might have been given an "F" by our children, and an "A" by the superintendent?

> **List reasons, adding your own to keep listing and discussion going. Among the items that should be named are:**

- **Relationship of speaker and listener such as, does one have power over the other.**
- **Distractions—hard to listen to one child when you are in charge of 20-30.**
- **Tension or uneasiness—you may be defensive and trying to think of what you're going to say instead of listening to them.**
- **Environment—too much noise, too many other people, or physical discomfort.**
- **Impatience to you—whether or not you think what the other person is saying is important.**
- **Time—are you in a hurry to do something else.**

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- **Other things on your mind—preoccupation.**
- **The way the other person looks, acts, and talks.**
- **Hearing only what you want to.**

In spite of all these reasons, we can learn to listen better, and in talking with parents, whether on the telephone or in person, we probably should.

We listen with more than our ears. Our eyes, our mind, and our feelings can help us listen better, but sometimes they can keep us from listening, too.

We can be better listeners if:

1. We genuinely, seriously, want to listen to what someone is trying to say.
2. We actively give our total attention to understanding what someone is saying.
3. We are receptive, both mentally and emotionally.
4. We are sensitive to the other person and respond to what he or she is trying to communicate (Gotts, 1977).

[illegible] key words on chalkboard, flip chart, or transparency for an overhead projector.

But in addition, we have to practice, because listening is a skill, and that's the way you learn a skill. Since it's pretty hard to practice being receptive or sensitive, let's list some of the ways we can show that we are genuine, serious, actively interested, receptive, and sensitive.

What do we do when we're "really listening?"

Generate list, adding items and encouraging participants to contribute more. Put abbreviated items on chalkboard, flip chart, or transparency. Work quickly to keep ideas coming. There is no need to elaborate on each one. The list should include items such as the following:

- **Maintain eye contact.**
- **Slight forward posture.**
- **Facial expression appropriate to subject.**

- **Nod, "Hmm", or other non-interrupting acknowledgements.**
- **If person pauses, let continue without interrupting.**
- **Ignore distractions.**
- **Don't put in your ideas until the other person is through.**
- **Face the person.**
- **Don't look bored or disinterested.**
- **Ask for clarification, if needed**
- **When the person is finished, or finished with a portion summarize and repeat back the essential parts of what they said, or what feelings they tried to convey, to see if you understood accurately.**

What we're going to do now is practice some of these specifics--and you'll all be so good at active listening that even the children will give you an "A"! This is the way we're going to do it.

We'll divide into teams of three. One person will be the speaker--in in this case, a parent. One person will be the listener--in this case, a a teacher, principal, or specialist. The third person will be the coach.

The person who is the parent is going to explain something factual to the teacher. For example, the parent might explain what the doctor has reported about a child's allergies and his or her instructions to the school, or something the PTA is proposing to do that has serious consequences fora particular classroom or school. All of you have been involved in enough of these situations that you won't even have to use your imaginations! Just remember!

The person who is the teacher, principal, or specialist is going to actively listen, practicing the skills we've listed, and any other special techniques they want to. Then, when the other person is through, the listener will give an "instant replay." That is, they will summarize the important points and repeat them back to the parent, with the parent correcting until they both agree on what was said.

So far, we have a familiar duet--a speaker and a listener, and you know what you are to do.

Check for understanding. Tell people who understand to fold their arms on the table. Those who don't put their hands in lap. Explain, demonstrate as necessary. Use those who understand to help others.

So who are the coaches? Just that. The coaches watch the practice with understanding and support. They are not to criticize and yell at you, like some coaches do, but they are to see and point out what you did right, what could have been better, what you forgot to do, and what you could practice next time. They'll do this after practice, or at a break in the practice, and help the two of you analyze what happened. One group of people studying how teachers and other people learn new skills has found that coaching helps (Joyce & Showers, 1983). After we've practiced once, we'll change roles so you all get a chance to practice listening and coaching.

I've asked a couple of people to help me demonstrate. I'll be the coach.

Short demonstration. Check for understanding, as above.

Notice that we gave the parent a chance to think about what he/she was going to say, and a little help, and that we worked until he/she agreed the listener understood. Notice that the coach gave both feedback and support. Now, we'll get in groups of three and get started. Practice once, then we'll stop and see if you have any questions.

Give grouping directions specific to the situation. Give each group the role cards, telling them to decide who is going to take which role first, second, and third.

Move from group to group to help define their tasks and get them started. Stop after practice run, check for understanding and clarification, then continue. Continue to monitor, but don't enter a group unless they need to be brought back on on track, rescued, or sent on to the next task. They sometimes forget to switch roles.

Keep the atmosphere light, so that people can become comfortable with practicing and coaching. If you don't hear some laughter and good-natured banter, something is wrong.

Since the groups will be working at different speeds, what do you do with those who have finished early? There are several options.

1. **Have them analyze what went well, and what didn't go well in their group to share with the others later.**
2. **Have them discuss what they liked or didn't like about coaching and being coached, and be ready to share with the group.**

3. Ask them to identify other situations in their own schools or lives where this type of active listening would be useful; list and share with group.

4. Have some short readings on active listening or coaching for them.

As the groups finish, help them reflect on what they have done. Here are some possible questions. Select the appropriate ones from these, or develop your own.

1. What were some of the difficulties in doing active listening for factual information?

2. In what ways did the "coaching" help or hinder? What did you like about it? Not like?*

3. What were some things you learned?

4. What were some things that went well in your group? Didn't go well?*

5. In what other school or life situations could you use this skill?*

*Be sure to direct these questions to any group assigned that task.

6. Are there times when you shouldn't use active or reflective listening?

Use question six as a conclusion and transition.

Active or reflective listening is a skill to use when you want to make sure that you thoroughly understand another person, and that the other person knows you are concerned, listening, and understanding. It is not something that you do during every conversation, although most of us could probably listen to each other a lot better than we do.

Followup:

Practicing is a lot easier than doing something in real life, so you've got a homework assignment. Try out, practice this technique on your colleagues, family, and of course, the parents. Make some notes about how it worked, their reactions, any difficulties you had, or funny things that happened.

We'll share these at the beginning of our next inservice, which will start with a quick review, then practice and coaching on using active listening when the person you are talking with is expressing a lot of emotion. This often happens when discipline and grades are the topic. Since you'll be playing the parent role, think about what you're going to say and do, and also about how you could use "active listening" as a teacher, principal, or specialist in that situation.

Today, we listened with our minds; next time, we'll use mind and heart!

Listen With Your Mind and Heart

Second Training Session

Objective: Participants will state or restate emotions conveyed in a statement to the satisfaction of the person talking.

Materials:
1. Chalkboard, flip chart, or overhead projector and transparencies
2. Index cards

Procedures: **Have participants share "homework." Share with them your own experiences. If a group has difficulty getting started, sharing your own practice items will help break the ice. If possible, have someone record how many report, and what they report, so you have an evaluation.**

Today we're going to practice again, but on reflecting feelings that people express or imply. This is much more difficult to do than reflecting or restating facts, as those of you who have tried it know. What are some possible reasons?

Discuss—List reasons if there seem to be a lot generated. Some possible ones:

- **We get emotional, too.**
- **We feel uneasy or threatened.**
- **We don't know what to say.**
- **We don't have training and skill in interpreting what people are feeling.**
- **We're afraid we'll say and do the wrong thing.**

All those are good reasons, but the high feelings are there, and we as school people often have to deal with them. Sometimes all that is necessary is for someone to listen to the parent and acknowledge how he or she feels.

Those of you familiar with Teacher Effectiveness Training, Parent Effectiveness Training, or other "affective listening" approaches will recognize the technique.

We're going to practice and coach the same way we did last time, but there will be two changes:

1. You are to get in different groups.

2. Those of you playing the role of parents will focus on conveying to the teacher a feeling. You don't have to state the feeling at all. In fact, you can talk about grades, or a discipline or homework problem, but in such a way that a feeling is conveyed. Listeners, you are to reflect those feelings in a way acceptable to speaker. Coaches, give them support, guidance, helpful hints on what they did right, and how they could improve.

Implement this activity with procedures similar to the factual reflection in the first session, including the follow-up (transfer) assignment.

REFERENCES

Gotts, E. E. (Ed.) (1977) Home visitor trainer's notebook. Charleston, West Virginia: Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.

Joyce, B. R., & Showers, B. (1983) Power in staff development through research on training. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

School-Family Communications: The Spoken Word

To the Leader:

This staff development session has two parts: One is about telephone calls to individual parents; the other about recorded messages. Both provide for recorded messages. Both provide for instruction, practice, and coaching or feedback from another person. Introductory material is set up so that participants' skill and experience are recognized--an important principle in inservice education.

You'll need a room large enough that the trios can form small groups and talk without distraction.

School-Family Communications: Telephone Calls

Objective: Participants will outline, practice, and receive coaching on at least two types of telephone calls to parents: (1) a get acquainted, good-news one, and (2) one where they must bring up and discuss problems and concerns, such as discipline or grades.

Materials:

1. Chalkboard, flipchart, or overhead projector and transparencies.
2. Index cards. Fold the cards lengthwise, so they will stand up. Print "parent," "teacher," "coach" on enough sets of 3 so that each trio will have a set.
3. Marking pens for printing the cards.
4. One copy of Handouts VI-7 and VI-8, "Telephone Tips for Teachers" and "School-Family Telephone Record" for each participant.

Procedures:

Personal contact is the most effective method of reaching parents and is widely used by many teachers at all levels of schooling. Some parents come by the school, we see others at the store, church, or other school and community functions. Others we never see at all. For them, a telephone call may be the link between school and home. In fact, teachers report that phone calls to the home are one of the best ways for schools and families to communicate. Calls need not be long to be effective. In fact, we might take a tip from success of the book "The One-Minute Manager" and try to become "The One-Minute Telephoner." A phone call doesn't need to be long to be effective.

However, a personal telephone call has both advantages and disadvantages for teacher and parent. Let's quickly list some of them.

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This listing can be done two ways:

1. **As a total group. To do this, write "Advantages" and "Disadvantages" at the top of the paper or chalkboard, then list each item in the appropriate place as the group suggests it.**

2. **As two or more smaller groups, with each group having an assigned focus of either "advantages" or "disadvantages." They generate the advantages or disadvantages within the group, then report back. This technique takes longer.**

Among the items that should be listed are:

Advantages

Establish personal contact

Know your message has gotten to the parent

Most parents have telephones

Find out things you don't learn in an exchange of notes

Give chance to clarify what people don't understand

Most people are used to *speaking* and *listening*

Can *exchange* ideas

Disadvantages

Finding people home

Calling during dinner or favorite TV show

Takes a lot of teacher's time

Can't always find right telephone number

Can't "read" non-verbal language

Hard to bring up difficult discussion topics

Parents only home at night—That's *my* time!

Just because we all use the telephone a lot doesn't mean that we always use it effectively. Businesses spend a lot of money training people to use the telephone.

Most of you, as teachers, have made a lot of telephone calls to parents, and have found out approaches that work and don't work. Among us, we have a lot of expertise on this technique.

Distribute Handout VI-7—"Telephone Tips for Teachers"

Handout VI-7

Telephone Tips for Teachers

For Introductory or "Good News" Calls	For Calls About Problems or Concerns
Mine	**Mine**
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
Others'	**Others'**
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________

Take three minutes to jot down your best ideas for introductory or good news calls. Then we'll share so you have the best ideas from a group of experts.

Leaders should also fill out "Mine" section. After three minutes, have people share their best ideas. If the following items are not included, add to your list on chalkboard or newsprint so people can copy them on the handout.

- Introduce and identify self: "I'm Kevin Becher, Shawn's 5th grade teacher."
- Ask if this is a good time to talk for _____ minutes.
- Make notes ahead of time of what you want to say.
- Start with something positive.
- Use plain English—no jargon.
- Make sure you understand family status. Parent's name may not be same as child's.
- Keep it short, simple, and to the point.
- Have a good conclusion (i.e. "I'm glad we had a chance to talk. If you need to call or see me about anything, call _______.)
- Use active listening. Use "I-messages."

Now comes practice time! First, we're going to call parents to report on a pleasant matter or just to get acquainted."

Use role-player (parent), role-taker (teacher), and coach trios as in "Listen With Your Mind and Heart." Quickly describe task and check for understanding. Have parent and teacher face in opposite directions to simulate the telephone situation.

Take a minute to make notes on what you want to report on, then pretend to call. Coaches, remember to observe and tell the teachers what they did right and what could be improved. Parents, don't give the teachers a hard time! Then switch roles.

Circulate, monitor, give help as needed. One practice

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is not enough to master a skill, so go through the procedure again if there is time. Have those groups who get through early begin generating ideas for the next task: calling about a problem or concern.

Good news is easy to talk about. Problems aren't. Teachers in the Appalachian Region asked for help in talking with parents about discipline and grades--and telephone calls are frequently about problems. Indeed, some parents think that's the only time they hear from the school.

Again, let's take three minutes to jot down our best ideas for telephoning parents about discipline, grades, and other problems, then we'll share and practice.

Follow procedures as in previous activity.

Ideas generated should include the ones below, plus others:

- **Don't make that your first call.**
- **Don't blame parent or child.**
- **Report objective information.**
- **Avoid labels.**
- **Talk about the problem as a shared one.**
- **Make some positive suggestions as to what to do; look for solutions.**
- **Start with something pleasant, but then get to the point.**
- **Choose words carefully; make some notes ahead of time; avoid jargon.**
- **Call as soon as possible after the problem arises, while parents and school can do something. AEL research says parents clear through secondary school want this kind of information (Gotts, 1983).**
- **Ask if parents have noticed any problems at home.**
- **Be as specific as possible.**
- **Make a note about when you called and what the subject was. Put in student file.**
- **Close conversation on a pleasant note.**
- **Actively listen for both facts and feelings.**

Now you have a chance to practice making that difficult call. In your groups, take a few minutes to discuss the problem you're going to call about. Most of you can just draw on your own experience! Help each other decide the best way or ways, then try out what you decided to do. Make that phone call.

> **Monitor group to make sure they understand task; give help as needed to teacher, parent, and coach; help change roles so all get a turn. If groups finish early, ask them to start making notes for the concluding discussion—reflecting back on what they learned. Select from the ones below, or develop your own.**
>
> 1. **What were some things that went well in your group? Didn't go well?**
> 2. **In what ways did the coaching help or hinder?**
> 3. **What makes problems and concerns such as discipline and grades so difficult to bring up?**
> 4. **What are some specific things you learned that you're going to try with parents?**
>
> **After everyone has finished, briefly discuss some of the items above.**

Followup:

At the beginning of the year, send home a "Welcome" note to parents, telling them you will be calling them soon, and how they can get in touch with you. Enclose a card for them to return giving their names, telephone number, time of day and day of week that is best to call, and any other information they would like you to have.

> **Distribute Handout VI-8, "School-Family Telephone Record."**

You'll need some way to keep track of who you have called and what you discussed. This form can be kept in each child's classroom file or in a separate file folder just for telephone contacts to provide a continuous record of school-family telephone communications. Some people suggest that you make a few calls every day.

However you decide to go about calling the families you work with, keep track of the calls, bring the forms back to our next inservice, and share how it went and what "telephone tips" worked best for you.

Handout VI-8

School-Family Telephone Record

Teacher's Name: ____________________

Student's Name: ____________________

Parent's Name: ____________________

Telephone Number Called: __________

You may wish to use this same record for calls from the family to you. Simply record "H" in the Response column.

	Day/Date	Time	Response*	Comments
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

Additional Comments/Record: ____________________

____

____

____

*A. Spoke With Parent
B. Busy Signal
C. No Answer
D. Disconnected Telephone
E. Scheduled Call Back __________
F. No Adult Home
G. Declined to Speak
H. Family Initiated Call
I. Other:

____

____

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School-Family Communications: Recorded Messages

Objective: Teachers will know what school-family communications are appropriate to put on a "recorded message" machine and will practice recording messages for parents to receive when they call in.

Materials:

1. Device for recording messages for telephone call-in. Ideally, you would have one for each age/grade level group of teachers. Tape recorders could also be used for practice.
2. Tapes--one for each person to take home would be ideal.
3. Chalkboard, flipchart or transparencies, and overhead projector.
4. One copy of Handout VI-9, "Improving School-Family Relations Through Recorded Messages," for each participant.

Procedures: Have recording machines set up so teachers can experiment with them while the group is gathering. You might want to delay starting if the experimentation is going well. Before starting, have participants sit in groups according to the age/grade level they teach--primary, intermediate, secondary. If you have all elementary teachers, they might sit in grade levels.

At one time or another, most of us have been irritated, annoyed, grateful, relieved, pleased, or angered by the telephone answering machines that seem to be everywhere. Some schools, however, have learned to use them to good advantage--for early morning call-ins; for general information about the school when no one is there; or as "hot lines" when parents have a complaint or problem. A few schools have experimented with the recorder as a classroom school-home communication tool and the results were excellent. Parents did call in and children's achievement on such things as spelling tests did improve. More parents returned permission slips and forms when reminded by the recorded message. In general, though, we have been slow to take advantage of these relatively inexpensive machines for hot-lines, warm-lines, help-lines, "Dial-a-Teacher," or whatever you want to call it.

Let's look at how we might use recorded messages to improve school-family communications.

1. First of all, remember that the message will be for a general audience--all the parents or children in your class or classes--as opposed to telephone calls about an individual child.
2. Second, the information must be short and to the point. The number of minutes will be determined by the machine's capability.

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3. The message should be available at a regular time and on a regular day, so families can establish the habit of calling in. The message should be changed regularly

4. The message should be pertinent to the child's school work or school functions and should make specific suggestions for what parents can do.

You're already in groups according to the age or grade level you teach. Working together, generate some specific ideas that teachers could record--either general information or information specific to a particular grade level or discipline. As an example, in elementary school, teachers might list the week's spelling words. Here is a sheet for you to record your ideas and to take home to remind you.

Distribute Handout VI-9, "Improving School-Family Relations Through Recorded Messages."

You've got ten minutes to discuss and record your ideas. Then, working as a group, you are to develop an appropriate message to put on the recorder. You might want to write what your group is going to say. As soon as you've done that, then you can practice recording, to see how you sound, and what you can do to improve both what you say and how you say it. The machines we have will take a message of ______minutes.

Check for understanding of task--arms on desk or thumbs up if they understand. Monitor work of groups, but don't intrude unless they need your help. When first group goes to record, you or someone else familiar with the machine's operation should be there. Some of the teachers probably have these at home. Let people take turns practicing. This is where more than one machine is needed. Watching someone else is not the same as actually recording and listening to yourself. Coach, comment, encourage, praise, as appropriate.

When group finishes practice, conclude and prepare for followup.

The recorder offers a good way to send messages to the home. Some barriers to its use are specific to each school.

- You may not have one at all--but look in all the closets first.
- There may be only one for the whole school.
- There may be a limited number of telephone lines coming into the school.

- It may be difficult to get parents in the habit of calling.

What are some ways to overcome these barriers?

> Discuss solutions to these and other barriers, such as different grades or discipline areas having assigned nights. That is, the first grade could use Monday night, and the second grade use Tuesday night, etc. Often telephone lines have more capacity than is being used, and adding more phones is not difficult. Newsletters, notices, and class calendars can contain information on how to "Dial-A-Teacher."

Some schools set aside a designated "hot line" hour each week when parents can call in to talk with the principal, psychologist, or other specialists. You might want to do this in your school or even for your own classroom. It might promote two-way communication.

Followup:

As soon as you get a recorded message system going in your school, call me at (leader's number), and leave the number to call to get your message. I would like to hear each one of you using this flexible message system.

Improving School-Family Relations Through Recorded Messages

"Dial-A-Teacher"

The Message

1. Is for a general audience.
2. Must be short and to the point.
3. Should be available at a regular time and day. Should have the message changed regularly.
4. Should be pertinent to the child's work and should make suggestions for what parents can do.

Ideas for Putting on a Recorded Message

General	Your Age/Grade Level

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Ingram, J. E. The relationship between school-community relations and school achievement. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Industrialized Schooling, Technical Report No. 463.

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School-Family Communications: The Written Word and Other Symbols

To the Leader:

This staff development session focuses on written messages from the school to the family, emphasizing those that can be quickly and easily done by a busy teacher. It has two sections:

1. First, after initial background information, teachers will brainstorm and share ideas for each of the four communication vehicles: individual messages, individual recognition, class calendars, class newsletters.

2. Second, teachers will experiment with different headings or logos, and develop at least one that they can use on the home-family communications from their class.

If they leave the session with ideas plus the material to implement those ideas, they are far more likely to put them into operation.

Some of the techniques are more appropriate for elementary schools than secondary. For example, certificates of appreciation and outstanding performance are used freely at the secondary level, but are usually reserved for special recognition ceremonies--and there are far more given for non-academic pursuits than academic. As these differences arise, let the teachers discuss and decide what techniques are appropriate for what age children. Maybe "what is" isn't "what ought to be." Perhaps a personal note mailed to a high school student and his or her parents could get around some of the problems of praise in front of peers. It's something to think about!

An alternative approach for this inservice would be to divide into groups and let each group generate the ideas for one vehicle of communication. That is, you would have four groups; one would develop ideas for written messages, one for recognitions, one for class calendars, and one for class newsletters or newsbriefs. The listings would then be posted for all to see and list on their handouts. This procedure would speed up the process, and would work well with a group of over 24 people.

In the second part of the session, arrange a "hands-on" workshop set-up. Materials could be placed in centers, where participants can work with one type of material at a time. An alternative arrangement would be to put all materials on one large table, where people can get what they need and return to their own workspace. Have some examples of different logos and formats for them to look at, and either clear directions for how to use each unfamiliar item or process, or have someone there to demonstrate.

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the original document was blank.

School-Family Communications: The Written Word

Objectives: As a group, participants will name items appropriate to include in or on an individual note, recognition, or concern sent home; class newsletter, or calendar.

Participants will know essential elements in communicating with families through written messages sent to the home.

Materials:

1. Chalkboard or flipchart or large pieces of newsprint, markers, masking tape. Pre-letter four sections of chalkboard and display so people can see them.

   (1) School-Family Messages: About Individual Children

   (2) School-Family Messages: Recognition for Individual Children

   (3) School-Family Communication: Class Calendar

   (4) School-Family Communication: Class Newsletter

2. One copy of Handout VI-10. "Ideas for Messages and Special Recognition," for each participant.

Procedures:

You know, interesting things happen in school to family and family to school communications. Researchers and school people usually agree that the school should take the initiative in establishing frequent contact with parents, informing them of what they need to know, and inviting participation and involvement in the school. Parents often respond by making more frequent contact with teachers and the school. Almost always, when school-home communication becomes real communication--that is, flowing both ways--everyone wins, especially the child.

There are innumerable ways for the school to make more frequent contact with parents, such as telephone calls, recorded messages, bulletin boards, school newsletters and notices, and parent-teacher conferences. Today we are going to concentrate on short and easily written communications that classroom teachers can do. These would be in addition to school wide communications such as report cards, school handbooks, school newsletters, and school calendars.

We'll look at and work on two kinds: written messages about individual children--individual notes and recognition "awards"--and written messages for the whole classroom group--class calendars and class newsletters. Then you'll have a chance to develop some models ready to use when you get back in your own classroom.

Let's look at form and content first.

For written messages about individual children, probably nothing else has quite as much meaning as a short, personal note. It takes a little time, but one or two a day, written or typed on a half sheet of paper, has great meaning to both parent and child. Many of you probably already do this.

> **If the group is large, you may want to set up small groups, and have them brainstorm within the group and develop a written list to post and briefly explain. Give each group newsprint and markers, and have the masking tape available.**
>
> **If the group is small, you may want to lead the brainstorming and have another person record on the appropriate sheet of newsprint or chalkboard. Add more newsprint or move to another chalkboard as needed. Vary your directions as appropriate.**

Remember the rules for brainstorming:

- No evaluation and discussion of the items
- Everyone try to contribute
- Generate as many ideas as you can
- Work quickly

All right, you're a classroom teacher and you've decided you're going to write two short messages a day. What are some topics, remarks, observations, or suggestions that would be appropriate to write about an individual child?

> **Allow a little thinking time. If no one starts after 20 or so seconds, say,—"Now it's time to share your ideas and we'll put them on the newsprint." Work quickly, recording ideas as they are generated by the group. Examples of what you may get:**
>
> - **An outstanding achievement (specify)**
> - **Had new hair cut, clothes, etc.—looked nice**
> - **Finished work on time**
> - **Led a group**
> - **Seemed tired**
> - **Made a new friend**
> - **Sick at stomach**
> - **Discipline problem**

Comment and encourage to keep ideas flowing.

There are lots of good ideas here! Remember to make what you say brief, specific, and personal to that child and family. Always make your first note something positive, and over the course of the year, talk about positive things three to four times as often as problems or concerns.

So you can remember all these good ideas, take 5 minutes to jot them down, and they'll be ready to go in your file or notebook on school-family communications.

Distribute Handout VI-10, "Ideas for Messages and Special Recognitions," then allow 5 minutes for copying. If people finish early, suggest that they start jotting down ideas for special recognition.

Now, let's look at ideas for special recognition for an individual child. Many schools or classrooms have simple certificates or awards that can be sent home with child.

Show examples on next pages, or use local examples.

You have to be a little careful not to send these home indiscriminately, but what are some things a classroom teacher could send home a recognition certificate for? Let's list as many as we can think of.

Use brainstorming procedures, as in previous discussion, then give people 5 minutes to write down on Handout VI-10 the individual and collective ideas to take home.

Ideas for Messages and Special Recognitions

Ideas for School-Family Messages About an Individual Child

Ideas for School-Family Special Recognition For an Individual Child

A Note of Thanks

In appreciation for what you have done!

____

____

____

____

____

____

Merci! Thanks! Danke! - Gracias!

CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Strike up the band

for ____________________

who is doing excellent work in

______________________________________.

Signed ____________________ *Date* ____________

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the original document was blank.

Now, let's look at information that needs to go to the whole class. Of course, there will be times when you want to send special notices home, but a regular class calendar, newsletter, "newsbrief," or notices are also useful. In fact, in a recent survey in Maryland, over 95 percent of the teachers involved said they sent notices home several times a year. The calendar can be posted so that parents have an overview of the month ahead; the newsletter or newsbrief can share other information in-depth.

Here is an example of a partially completed class calendar--see page 99. It has the lunch menu, parent-meeting, a minimal day, a "multi-cultural week," and a few other things on it. What other information might a classroom teacher want to include?

Alabama's State Community Education Office suggests a "Learning Calendar," such as this one. (Example on page 101.)

Brainstorm and list items for class calendar as in previous activities. Distribute Handout VI-11, "Class Calendars, Newsletters, or Newsbriefs." Have participants fill in ideas the group has generated. If some get through before the others, ask them to begin listing ideas for classroom newsbriefs.

Periodic newsletters or newsbriefs are another valuable communication tool. Current research is showing that parents do read school newsletters and find them important sources of information. But most school or district newsletters have little information in them about individual classes. A one-page "newsbrief" might be worth considering. If you have a good duplication system, consider putting the newsbrief on the back of the school calendar for the coming month. Parents can then post the calendar. Explanations of specific calendar items could be in the newsletter or newsbrief.

Now, let's generate some ideas about what to put in class newsletters or newsbriefs.

Generate list. It should include such things as:

- **Items parents could save for a class project**
- **Reminders**
- **Thanks for parents and others who have helped**
- **Curriculum emphasis**
- **Ideas of ways to help at home**

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- Highlighting a community resource especially appropriate for a grade (children's museum--good TV show, etc.)

- Paragraphs, poems, or art work the children created

- Class average on a spelling test

- Spelling words

- Study topics in a particular grade

Pages 13 to 15, Section V, give guidelines for newsletters. Although they are primarily for administrators, several of them apply to all communications home. You might wish to share some of those guidelines with the participants. Page 17, which gives tips for making a newsletter readable and attractive, could be reproduced for a handout.

If you're already using one of these school-home communications, try another one, too. They accomplish different things. If you've not been using them, try one or two. You--and the parents and children--may like it!

Parent volunteers or older children might help with the class calendar or newsletter. Once the format is set up, they don't take much time.

If your school or class is fortunate enough to have a microcomputer with word processing capabilities, investigate to see if it can be used to set up your individual and group notices home. Some of those machines can do fantastic things! That's what we're going to work on next--you'll have a chance to play around with a format that reflects your class and your school.

End of 1st section--Break time!

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
2	3 Pig In a Blanket PTA meeting 3:15	4 Pepperoni Pizza	5 Hamburger on a bun	6 Spaghetti with meat sauce
9 Sloppy Joe on a bun	10 Student's Choice	11 Beef Taco	12 Cheeseburger on a bun	13 Chili Con Carne
16 Macaroni and Cheese	17 Hamburger on a Bun Posture Screening	18 Pizza with Sausage Symphony 10:00-12:30	19 MINIMAL DAY Kdg. P.M.	20 Beef and Cheddar on a Bun END FIRST SEMESTER REPORT CARDS
23 Pig in a Blanket	24 Combination Pizza Area Advisory 7:30 Alameda High School	25 Beef Taco	26 Cheeseburger on a whole wheat bun	27 Spaghetti with meat sauce
30 Barbecued Pork on a bun MULTI-CULTURAL WEEK----------------------------	31 Ham and Cheese Submarine			

Learning Calendar

Research indicates that children achieve better in school when parents are involved. *How do you get parents involved?*

In the elementary school, the teacher can use a "Calendar of Learning" that gives a suggested activity for the parent to do with the child each day. The activity takes a brief amount of time, but lets the child know that the parent is interested in the child's work. A sample for the month of March and April is printed below. Contact the State Community Education Office for a duplicatable copy at 1-800-392-8086 or write to Community Education Office, 111 Coliseum Blvd., Montgomery, AL 36193.

1984 MARCH 1984

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Memo:				1 Study spelling and reading words every Thursday	2 Ask your child to tell you what time it is several times today.	3 Let your child invite a friend to come and play
4 National Peanut Month. Roast peanuts with your child	5 Give your child a catalog. Ask him to cut out 4 pictures of tools, toys, shoes, etc.	6 Read part of a story to your child. Let him tell you how he thinks the story will end.	7 Read the whole story to your child. Talk about the difference in the way the the story ended.	8 Let your child write the names of common household things. Example: sofa, chair.	9 Draw a clock face for your child. Have some of the numbers missing. Let him fill in the missing numbers.	10 Take your child to the Library to check out a book.
11 Have your child clip "cents-off" coupons from the newspaper. Count the savings.	12 Cut a comic strip apart. Have your child put it in the right order.	13 Write 10 math problems for your child to work.	14 Write 5 compound words. Help your child find the two words. Example: bedroom—bed room.	15 Listen to your child say his address, zip code, and phone number.	16 Praise your child for something he has done well in school.	17 Read to your child about St. Patrick's Day.
18 Spring begins. Take a walk with your child.	19 Write 4 sentences about spring with your child.	20 Ask your child's teacher if you can help her in any way.	21 Read a book about animals to your child.	22 Have your child write 5 sentences using words from his spelling or word cards.	23 Let your child make up 10 math problems. You work them and let him see if you worked them right.	24 Fly a kite with your child.
25 Tell your child you love him today.	26 Start a seed collection with your child.	27 Help your child look up 3 words in the dictionary.	28 Listen to your child read a story aloud.	29 Continue to make word cards from your child's reading list.	30 Watch a TV program with your child and talk about it.	31 Have your child help fix and serve lunch.

1984 APRIL 1984

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 Praise your child for everything he does well at home and at school.	2 Make math cards with your child.	3 Have your child write 5 words that are opposite in meaning. Example: left-right	4 Have your child draw 2 clocks, one showing the time he gets up and one showing the time he goes to bed.	5 Study your spelling and reading words.	6 Have your child look at a cereal box. Circle the words that tell what is in the cereal.	7 Pick some wild flowers with your child.
8 See that your child gets a good night's sleep.	9 Help your child make a list of the things he needs to do each morning. Hang this on the wall.	10 Have your child follow these directions: (1) draw a house, (2) draw a tree next to the house, (3) draw a kitten next to the tree.	11 Discuss the value of coins with your child. Example: dime—10¢, quarter—25¢.	12 Help your child circle the short vowel sounds in his spelling or reading words.	13 Help your child add the high and low temperature for today. Use the radio, TV, or newspaper weather report.	14 Take your child to the grocery store. Help him add the cost of two or more things.
15 This is Earth Week. Help your child plant a flower or vegetable.	16 Read a nature book with your child.	17 Pretend you are an animal. Write a story about what you like to do.	18 Have your child draw 4 carrots. Write a root word on the root and an ending on the top of the carrot.	19 Write spelling words in ABC order.	20 Give your child a ruler. Have him draw a rabbit with ears 4 inches long.	21 The Easter Bunny colored 25 eggs. During the night he ate 8. How many does he have left?
22 Let your child help prepare Easter dinner.	23 Read a poem to your child. Have him name the rhyming words.	24 Help your child think of words that sound alike but have different meanings. Example: by—buy, sea—see	25 After watching a TV program, have your child tell the main event of the program.	26 Play word games with your child. Say a word and have him say a word that begins with the same letter.	27 Write 5 math problems with mistakes in two of them. Have your child choose the problems that are wrong and correct them.	28 Have your child help you plan Sunday dinner.
29 Don't forget to set your clocks one hour forward. Let your child help.	30 Have your child select 5 comic strips or books. Put the titles in ABC order.			Memo:		

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Handout VI-11

Class Calendars, Newsletters, or Newsbriefs

Ideas for School-Family Communication Through a Class Calendar

Ideas for School-Family Communication Through a Class Newsletter or Newsbrief

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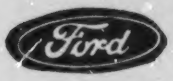
School-Family Communications: Symbols Speak

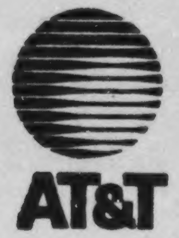
Objective: Participants will prepare at least one logo and heading appropriate to use immediately as a consistent symbol of their class in communications to the home.

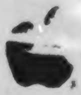
Materials:

1. Blank sheets, 8 1/2" x 11" paper
2. Blank sheets, 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" paper (half-sheets)
3. Ruled paper, transparent tape, masking tape, rubber cement, other art supplies
4. Grid for class calendar (Handout VI-12)
5. Ruler, scissors, variety of marking pens and pencils
6. Samples of symbols, logos, headings from various institutions
7. Press-on letters in various sizes
8. Tables to work on and a room big enough for people to move around in

Procedures: Collect, then post examples of familiar, and instantly recognizable logos and type-faces that organizations have developed as part of their way of communicating with the world. Look for a variety, such as the examples below. Include some local ones.







As people come in to the room, let them browse to get acquainted with the work materials. Those who wish to begin work can do so.

Letting people proceed independently or in small groups serves as a "sponge" to help them use their

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time to complete the task at hand. You can move from group to group to get them started. After everyone has assembled, give a signal to get their attention, then proceed with the more formal introduction. No need to physically reconvene everyone. Let them watch and listen where they are working. Do get everyone's attention, though.

Most organizations spend much time, money, and creative effort to project to the public a particular image. Familiar examples are:

Name the examples you have.

When the telephone companies were split up, the new AT&T went to great lengths to make its new logo something that could become the image of communications.

Many schools and school districts have developed a distinctive logo--a symbol, picture, and type that makes that school instantly recognizable. It's a good idea. At the school level, the school mascot--an eagle, panther, tiger, or other animal--is often used. At the classroom level, we often don't have such resources for our written messages. Yet, what the individual teacher sends home is often more important to a family than a district-wide communication.

What image do you want to project?

- Dignified and slightly serious?
- Whimsical?
- Playful?
- Proud and full of school spirit?
- Humorous?
- Child-like and child-oriented?
- Solid as a rock?
- Responsive?
- This is something I'm supposed to do, so I'll get it done as quickly as possible.

You can communicate any of those images, and others before parents even read a word. A sloppily dittoed notice communicates in a powerful way! Spend a little time developing a consistent format that you can use. It will make your job easier and be an integral part of your school-family communication. Maybe you are tired of happy faces and gold stars and want to create a new image. Now's your chance.

A few examples: You might want to use your district's logo or symbol, and put "Mr. Lee's First Grade" or another heading near it in neat printing, press-on letters, or type (show sample of district logo on success-o-gram). Or perhaps your state, district, or school has a theme they are emphasizing, and you want to pick up on that theme. Tennessee, for example, has material emphasizing "Education is a Family Affair" that could be used for many communications. Mountains and valleys symbolize another district.

The examples above are on the following three pages. You may wish to show others, particularly successful local ones.

Your task now is to look at some of the examples we've shown and that you know about, then

- Think about your classroom, your school, and decide what kind of image you want parents to have of them.

- Develop what you have in mind from the materials we have here. If you can't find what you need, make a plan so that you can do it back home. Remember, you want something suitable to put on short messages that will probably be on half-sheets, certificates of recognition, class calendars, and newsletters or newsbriefs. Some teachers put all the messages home from their particular classroom on one color paper. That's not a bad idea. If you're going to do that, make sure your logo and printing will reproduce and show up well on that color! You can make several logos and decide later which one is really you and your classroom.

Show participants what materials you have for them to use and the procedures they are to use. Encourage them to help each other; as someone creates something interesting, show it to the others. Circulate among the participants, giving help as needed. Conclude by having each person show their favorite and tell what image they were trying to project.

Handout VI-12

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY

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SUCCESS-O-GRAM

SLSD

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**Education...
is a family affair.**

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Poudre School District R 1

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MESSAGE TO PARENTS

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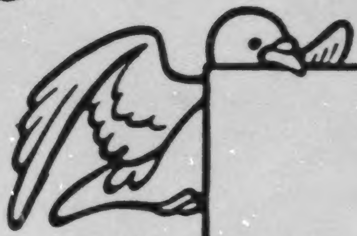
MESSAGE TO PARENTS



MESSAGE TO PARENTS

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School-Family Communications: Academic Guidance Sheets

To The Leader:

We are so used to thinking of inservice training as group meetings or workshops that we forget other methods. Teachers are quite capable of learning on their own. In many cases, inservice training can be accomplished through self-instructional materials that teachers can study and try out alone or working informally with another group of teachers. This "inservice" is of that nature.

The self-instructional module is designed to be distributed to teachers if a school, school district, or even an individual teacher decides to notify parents that a child is having difficulty in a particular school expectation through "interim progress reports," "academic deficiency notices," or a personal conference. When and if that decision is made, teachers need and will be receptive to information and materials to help them.

If information on the pages that follows is distributed to teachers at the time a final decision on "interim progress reports" is made, it will be both immediate and relevant--and likely to be read and used.

Attach the appropriate academic guidance sheet--elementary for elementary teachers; secondary for secondary teachers. Assure teachers you will be available if they need any help and put your name and telephone number in a prominent place on the module.

As with the other staff development materials in this resource book, you may duplicate as many as you need.

Followup:

After the interim progress reports go out from the school or class, distribute the follow-up evaluation (Handout VI-13) to all or a sample of the teachers who received the self-instructional module.

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Dear Colleague:

Earlier this year you received a self-instructional module about and a sample of an "academic guidance sheet." The sheet was to be sent home to parents to help them analyze why a child might be having trouble in school and then take appropriate action. To find out if the sheets were useful to you and the parents, we are asking you to answer the following questions and return to ______________________________.

How many of the academic guidance sheets did you send to parents? ________________

How many interim progress reports or academic deficiency reports did you send to parents? ________________

How useful do you think the academic guidance sheets were to parents? (Circle one)

Very useful Useful Not at all useful

What suggestions do you have for improving the academic guidance sheets?

____

____

____

____

What comments did parent have, if any, about the interim progress reports and academic guidance sheets?

____

____

____

____

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Do you have any indications that parents took any of the suggested actions?

Other comments:

Thank you for your help.

Using Academic Guidance Sheets

Edward E. Gotts

Background. Over the past two years, AEL has studied the effects of schools sending home "interim grade reports." The interim report is an academic deficiency notice that is sent home between regular grading periods. Its purpose is to give the parents and student time to take corrective action before the grade becomes an official part of the student's permanent record.

Parents who have received such a notice or have heard about the practice tend to view this special effort at personal communication as "helpful" and "useful." They hold positive attitudes toward the practice and, consequently, toward schools which implement it. Their comments suggest that the practice is well accepted because it "gives time" to correct the deficiency--while report cards do not.

A large majority of parents who received an interim grade report took some sort of action. Most talked to the child, the teacher, or both. However, a careful study of parents' remarks indicated that the kinds of corrective action taken were quite limited. That is, the interim reports did not usually produce careful analysis of the child's learning difficulty nor did they lead to actions designed specifically to overcome particular barriers to effective learning.

The foregoing findings caused us to reach the following conclusion: Interim grade reports are a potentially valuable means of school-home communication; however, the impact of this practice appears to be limited by the need of parents for further guidance in how to respond to the particular circumstances surrounding their child's academic difficulty. The challenge, thus, appeared to be: How could parents receive guidance that would permit them to analyze the child's situation and to consider courses of corrective action?

In seeking an answer to the preceding question, we allowed ourselves to consider only solutions which would: (a) be exceedingly inexpensive to implement (i.e., because of tight school budgets); (b) require no additional personnel; (c) be usable within the framework of typical existing practices; (d) not be time consuming for school personnel; (e) be understandable, uncomplicated, and to the point; and (f) encourage an active, partnership role for parents.

Academic Guidance Sheets. A solution which seemed to fulfill the preceding six criteria was designed. It is our "academic guidance sheets" (i.e., "Helping Your Child"), of which we have prepared separate versions for use at elementary and secondary levels. These sheets are intended to be sent home with the interim grade reports, thereby providing parents with guidance, as needed. In connection with this suggested timing, it should be noted that the guidance would be of less practical value if distributed at regular grading times. Guidance sheets would, further, appear to generate more motivation to make corrections if distributed at times when corrections can make a more immediate difference. We, moreover, anticipate that parents will view the guidance suggestions more positively when they can make a difference--and perhaps even somewhat negatively if given out when the possibility of change is already "foreclosed" for a grading period.

The guidance sheets begin at the top of the page with an introduction that: (a) encourages an active stance by the parent; (b) indicates the purpose is to help the child perform better academically; and (c) explains how to apply the guidance procedure. The procedure is divided into columns labelled Reasons and Actions. Parents are to read the listed "Possible reasons for poor work" and to consider (i.e., analyze) whether any of them applies. For any that may apply they are to study and try the correspondingly numbered action. The actions themselves may entail discussion, collaboration, supervision, monitoring, and other involvements in the child's establishment of good study habits. Finally, general reminders appear at the bottom of the sheet that ask the parent to initiate further discussion with the teacher and others. The guidance suggestions have been limited to a simple page. This page may be used as a checklist and worksheet as well.

Using the Guidance Sheets. First, the sheets are to be sent home with interim grade reports. This may be done by the individual teacher. When interim reports are completed at the secondary level by all teachers at the same time, they are usually collected and sent home together. In this case, a single copy of the guidance sheet would accompany the one or more deficiency reports.

The preceding discussion assumes that the guidance sheets will be sent home without comment. Another method is to send them home with the teacher's suggestions (e.g., noted by check marks or circling) about what some of the reasons may be for the academic deficiency. This method takes more teacher time; it may also result in more teacher-parent discussion. If this method is to be used at the secondary level, each teacher needs to complete a guidance sheet based on observations of the student in the particular classroom/subject setting. A related point is that, if the teacher checks the 'reasons', it will also be necessary to keep some record of this to refer to in discussions with parents.

When teachers are to make suggestions about possible reasons, the introduction should be changed at the top of the page to cover this. For example, in the introduction, just before the last sentence (that is, before, "You can ask the school for more help if you need it"), the following words might be added: "I have checked some of 'reasons' that seem to fit, based on how I have seen your child acting in class. I hope that you will look over all the 'reasons' and decide for yourself which ones apply."

Two methods of using the guidance sheets have been considered. The first is less work for the teacher. The second is more personalized and permits the teacher to share with parents classroom observations about possible reasons. We lack findings that would lead us to recommend one of these methods over the other, so the method selected should be based on local preference.

Since guidance sheets have been discussed in relation to interim grade reports, another point should be considered here. When academic deficiencies are reported, for most families this can be an unpleasant communication. Yet, it is often possible to say something positive about the student in the same report (for example, "she is trying," "attendance has improved," "the grade can be brought up by turning in two make-up assignments," etc.). In one high school where teachers systematically made positive comments in interim grade reports, the result was that parents viewed the school's effort more positively. Further, it should be easier for parents to be constructive with their children if the emphasis of the report is not focused wholly on the student's shortcomings. When we suggest this, however, we do not recommend that teachers say positive things which they do not believe. The point is to look for the positive; often it is there.

Some parents may ask what they are expected to do with the guidance sheets. The best answer is to indicate that they are provided for the parent's use; the school does not expect to have them returned. Parents may be instructed that school personnel hope that they will analyze the reasons and take corrective actions as best they can, while seeking additional help if needed.

It is well, further, to emphasize with parents that perspective is important. This may call for discussion of these ideas: (a) there is time to correct the problem; (b) a failure in one subject area must be viewed in the context of the student's overall progress; (c) it is okay for a parent to feel unable to help and to ask that someone else be allowed to do so; (d) the parent-child relationship is more important than the child's academic progress; and (e) the parent will be more able to help the child academically if he or she will maintain a sense of perspective based on the foregoing points plus a sense of respect for the child's individuality.

Elementary

HELPING YOUR CHILD

For parent who receives report that student's work "Needs Improvement" (N).

This sheet is to help you decide how to help your child do better. Please study the list of "Reasons" below on the left. Ask yourself if any of them applies to your child. If you think a "reason" applies, study and try the "action" to the right of it. For example, if reason #1, "Poor attendance or tardiness," applies, then try action action #1, "See that make-up work is done." You can ask the school for more help if you need it.

	Reasons		Actions
	Possible reason for poor work		Here's what to try:
1.	Poor attendance or tardiness.	1.	See that make-up work is done.
2.	Seems tired all the time _or_ easily loses control.	2.	Gets child to bed on time and be sure child eats good breakfast and lunch. Get medical check-up.
3.	Does not know what the teacher said to do _or_ cannot remember.	3.	Teach child to write down what the teacher says.
4.	Lack of attention in class _or_ too much daydreaming.	4.	Talk with teacher and child about what distracts or hold child's attention.
5.	Daily class work _or_ homework is not done or turned in.	5.	Ask teacher to send work home; then have a quiet place and a time for study.
6.	Is not putting out enough effort _or_ easily discouraged.	6.	Encourage your child; use rewards, if necessary.
7.	Works on homework but forgets to do part of it.	7.	Have child list all homework to be done before starting.
8.	Daily work is fine but student does not do well on tests _or_ child is nervous and restless.	8.	Teach your child to try relaxing while you ask questions from the lesson.
9.	Dreads going to school; shyness.	9.	Be firm about going to school; take the child to school, if necessary.
10.	Is bothered in class by another student.	10.	Ask for student to sit someplace else.
11.	Tries but cannot seem to catch on or keep up; acts helpless.	11.	Tutor your child or get a tutor. Ask the teacher if the child needs to be in a different class.
12.	Child seeks lots of attention.	12.	Tell child which behaviors will get positive attention; give that attention.
13.	Child is stubborn and always wants to have own way.	13.	Try to go along with child's way, as long as the job gets done.

Try talking things over with your child and your child's teacher. That will help you decide which of the reasons explain why your child is not doing well. If you still cannot decide what is wrong, check with the principal or counselor. This sheet is for you to keep and refer to. You do not need to return it to the school.

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Secondary

HELPING YOUR CHILD

For parent who receives report that student's work "Needs Improvement" (N).

This sheet is to help you decide how to help your child do better. Please study the list of "Reasons" below on the left. Ask yourself if any of them applies to your child. If you think a "reason" applies, study and try the "action" to the right of it. For example, if reason #1, "Poor attendance or tardiness," applies, then try action action #1, "See that make-up work is done." You can ask the school for more help if you need it.

Reasons Possible reasons for poor work:	Actions Here's what to try:
1. Poor attendance or tardiness.	1. See that make-up work is done. Make sure child gets to school everyday, and on time.
2. Seems tired all the time.	2. Get child to bed on time. Get medical check-up.
3. Does not know what the teacher said to do or cannot remember.	3. Teach child to write down what the teacher says. Buy small notebook and show child how to use!
4. Lack of attention in class.	4. Talk with teacher and child about what distracts the child's attention.
5. Daily class work is not done or turned in.	5. Ask teacher to send this home to be done.
6. Homework is not done or turned in.	6. Set a quiet study time at home each day; keep it that way.
7. Is not putting out enough effort.	7. Encourage your child; use rewards if needed.
8. Is bothered in class by another student.	8. Ask for student to sit someplace else.
9. Works on homework but forgets to do part of it.	9. Have child list all homework to be before starting.
10. Daily work is fine but student does not do well on tests.	10. Teach your child to try relaxing while you ask questions from the lesson.
11. Tries but cannot seem to catch on or keep up.	11. Tutor your child or get a tutor. Ask the teacher if the child needs to be in a different class.

Try talking things over with your child and your child's teacher. That will help you decide which of the reasons explain why your child is not doing well. If you still cannot decide what is wrong, check with the principal or counselor. This sheet is for you to keep and refer to. You do not need to return it to the school.

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School-Family Communications: Parent-Teacher Conferences

To The Leader:

In this resource notebook we have suggested many techniques to keep positive school-family communications flowing. We have summarized current research and best thinking on productive staff development. In the first portions of Section VI, we gave examples of the way some of those staff development principles could be incorporated into actual inservice training in school-family relations, with emphasis on areas of need identified during AEL's work with schools and teachers. However, we made no effort to include all relevant topics, for reasons explained in the introduction (Section I).

Staff development must be tailored to the needs, strengths, and the particular circumstances that prevail in a school or school district. This portion of the Resource Notebook presents a number of resources related to parent-teacher conferences, reviews the principles of staff development that you want to consider in planning and implementing staff development, and suggests that you develop an action plan appropriate for a school or schools.

We chose to do this with the topic "Parent-Teacher Conferences" because AEL's studies indicate that:

- Elementary school teachers regard parent-teacher conferences as the most successful school-family communication technique.
- The use of parent-teacher conferences varies from district to district and state to state in the Appalachian Region.
- Parent-teacher conferences are almost always available if the school initiates them.
- Parents of elementary school children report that they want regular conferences with their children's teachers.
- Parents of secondary school children report that they want conferences scheduled "as needed."
- Teachers requested assistance in talking with parents about discipline and grades, topics that are frequently discussed in parent-teacher conferences.
- School personnel's methods of scheduling and conducting parent-teacher conferences may have to change with the increase in dual employment, single-parent homes, remarriage, and other family changes.

There will probably be much variability in the needs of the people you are working with. Use the planning process outlined earlier:

- Assess Needs and Interests
- Develop Goals and Objectives

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- Identify Resources: People, Material, Time, Space, Money
- Design Activities
- Implement Activities
- Evaluate and Follow-up

Review the principles of staff development and adult education summarized in Section III, Staff Development: Research and Recommendations.

Review the resource material on parent-teacher conferences we have included, and collect other material as needed and appropriate. Information on parent involvement is being generated rapidly, so search for current information and resources. You may not want to use any of the material we have included, but locate information that may be more specific to your concerns.

As you plan, be sure to model and include good instructional practices, including:

- clear objectives
- activities designed to achieve those objectives
- recognition of individual differences (sponge activities for people who come early, or work quickly; variety of learning methods)
- clear directions and demonstrations; checks for understanding
- effective use of time
- recognition of the knowledge and skills that learners already have
- provision for practice and recognition of the problems of transfer
- followup

Just as teachers plan in highly individual ways, we expect that staff development specialists do, too.

We would suggest that whatever thinking and planning process you use, your plan of action should include the following categories.

Statement of need and/or interest. Ideally, this should be the discrepancy between "what is" and "what is preferred." Such a statement will help everyone retain focus on the overall purpose, especially if more than training session or objective is involved.

State goals and objectives. There may be only one, or there may be one broad goal and several objectives that must be met to reach the goal. The goals and objectives should help meet the identified need.

Resources. In thinking about resources, identify your constraints and your possibilities:

Constraints: List known constraints or "givens" first. Determine:

- How many people
- Teaching what age/grade level
- Existing method of handling parent-teacher conferences, problems, and strengths of this approach
- Times available for inservice
- Space available
- Will the participants know each other in advance? In what context?
- Budget constraints

Possibilities: List all possible materials and methods that might be appropriate to achieve the objectives. We often stop too soon in this. Teachers get as tired of the same methods of presentation as children do.

If time or space are problems, see if a different configuration of of materials and methods can help overcome the problems. Perhaps a learning center set up in a school's "teacher work room," with conference plan sheets, examples of what other people have done, suggestions for discussing touchy topics, and other appropriate material is all that is needed for a particular school.

Design activities. As with any teaching, there is some artistry involved in this step. Selecting, varying, and pacing activities involves an artistic blending of what you know about the group and about how people learn, about the way one activity leads into another and about planning "enough," but not "too much." A few hints:

- Even with participants who know each other, a well-designed opening activity can help set the stage for what is to come. It can also help you get to know the mood of your group, and allow for the arrival of any latecomers.

Opening activities can help a group get acquainted, relax, get in the mood to learn, become familiar with the topic, pose a pertinent problem, or achieve many other purposes.

- Plan at least one activity that can be used or not used as time allows.
- Unless the inservice is very short, plan for more than one method of learning. If nothing else, use "guided reflection" to help teachers relate information to their own experiences.
- Have the participants do something--mentally, physically, emotionally, or socially. Practice is appropriate if a skill is involved, but participants can also be actively involved in acquiring knowledge, adding to their experience, modifying attitudes, or coaching others.
- Don't be afraid of some inspiration and motivation. All people need to be inspired, including--or perhaps especially--school personnel.
- Plan a closing activity that helps people put into action what they have learned. If what they are to do requires special forms (such as planning forms for a parent-teacher conference), make sure they leave with either a copy ready to duplicate or a copy for each child and family in their class.
- For each major objective or portion of the inservice, we suggest that you use a form that lists:

  Objectives:

  Materials:

  Procedures:

  Followup/Evaluation:

Implement activities. Double check all plans, logistics, materials. Start on time. Be sensitive and responsive to the needs and interests of the group, ready to lengthen, shorten, or change. Every group is a little different; as leader, you will need to respond to people as they are on that day.

End on time. You may have to diplomatically cut short a discussion (say you'll meet with people individually), but it's better to leave them wanting more than to have them walk out.

Followup and evaluation. Remember there are many ways and times to evaluate, so don't always have the last activity be "feedback." In some situations, that may spoil the tone of a carefully crafted motivational inservice. Remember, there are many ways and times to followup and evaluate.

Description of Sources and Resources

We have included the following resources for your information:

1. Seven steps to a successful parent conference
2. Excerpts from Teacher-Parent Interactions which gives general information on planning a conference
3. Sample parent form and teacher form for a school conference
4. Short "Do's" and "Don'ts" Guidelines
5. "When A Parent Thinks You're Wrong."
6. A list of other sources

Using these resources, other information you may have, and the steps outlined above, you're ready to put together an inservice on "Improving Parent-Teacher Conferences."

Seven steps to a successful parent conference

This seven-step conference planner should be prepared for each student. Obviously, this is a lot of work . . . but it's work that will make a difference. You'll find the planning worth the effort, because when parents get the information they want and need, you and your school will get the support you need and deserve.

Step One: Subject Areas/Topics

Write down the areas/topics you intend to cover in each conference.

Step Two: Major Objectives

What's the basic reason for this conference, anyway? What do you hope to accomplish? What do you *need* to communicate? What do you *want* to communicate?

Step Three: Conference Plan

What steps can you follow during the conference to assure that you meet your major objectives? For example, what questions will you ask, what points will you make, what suggestions will you offer? Will you allow time for parents to ask questions and make comments?

Step Four: Materials

What materials should be shared with parents? Are they organized in a sequence that will complement your conference plan?

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Step Five: Action Plan

How can you wind up the conference with an action orientation? What specific steps, if any, will you recommend? What ways can the parents work with you to improve their child's education?

Step Six: Closure

Summarize what has been said during the conference. (Tell parents again what you have already told them.) End with a friendly thanks to the parents. Tell them it's nice to work with parents who are concerned about their child.

Step Seven: Evaluation

After the conference, ask yourself these questions:

- Was I prepared?
- Did I have an informal setting and insure privacy?
- Did I use time well?
- Did I begin on a positive note?
- Did I listen attentively?
- Did I encourage parents to talk and offer suggestions?
- Did I plan with — not for — the parents?
- Did I learn anything new that will help me teach the child?
- Was I well enough informed about what's happening in my school?
- If the conference could be repeated, what would I do differently?

The Parent Conference Planner, Department of Communication/
Management Training. MaComb Intermediate School District
Mt. Clemmons, Michigan.

Sample Parent Form for School Conference

Name of Child: ______________________________

Parents: ______________________________

Date: ______________________ Grade: __________

Student Strengths Observed at Home by Parent:

Student Needs Observed at Home by Parent:

Suggestions for Action: (To be completed at time of conference)

Home Setting:

School Setting:

Please complete form prior to scheduled conference. Bring to conference. (Optional)

The Parent-Teacher Conference; Charles W. Edwards, College of Education, East Tennessee State University.

Tennessee Department of Education materials.

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Sample Teacher Form for School Conference

Name: ______________________________ Date: ______________

School: ______________________________ Grade: ______________

Teacher: ______________________________

Student Strengths Observed by Teacher:

Student Needs Observed by Teacher:

Suggestions for Action: (To be completed at time of conference)

Home Setting:

School Setting:

Teacher: Complete form prior to scheduled conference.

The Parent-Teacher Conference; Charles W. Edwards, College of Education, East Tennessee State University.

Tennessee Department of Education materials.

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GUIDELINES TO PARENT CONFERENCING

DO

1. Do select one or two major goals for the conference.
2. Do be on time.
3. Do be prepared in advance.
4. Do remember that you're talking to another adult and not a child.
5. Do KISS - "Keep It Simple and Straight."
6. Do watch body language and voice tone.
7. Do provide support when appropriate.
8. Do abandon and yell for help when necessary.
9. Do share information with child in advance when possible.
10. Do share some positive feedback with all parents.
11. Do keep information confidential.
12. Do give the parent plenty of time to share his/her perceptions.
13. Do provide for R & R following conferences.

DON'T

1. Don't minimize the problem.
2. Don't use jargon.
3. Don't make promises that can't be kept.
4. Don't be afraid to interrupt.
5. Don't share personal experiences.
6. Don't say anything that you wouldn't want the child to know.
7. Don't argue.
8. Don't take things personally.
9. Don't cover too much information.
10. Don't drag the conference out too long.

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WHEN A PARENT THINKS YOU'RE WRONG

1. Include the principal when you expect parents to be hostile in any way.
2. Remain as calm and unemotional as possible. Again, your mood is contagious. Talk softly.
3. Ask them to be seated.
4. Let them talk first and find out exactly what they are unhappy about.
5. Be open minded. Don't assume they are wrong.
6. When they are finished, give your side of the story.
7. If you were wrong, admit it. Don't try to defend an indefensible position.
8. The tone that should prevail in such discussions is one of teacher working with parent for the good of the child, not teacher versus parent.
9. Usually the two of you will agree when all the facts are known.
10. When you don't agree remind the parent that even when you don't agree, both you and the parent are interested in doing what is best for the child.
11. Make certain the parents understand your position on the issue and won't be surprised by any future action you take. If they are demanding something you are not willing to do, be certain they understand this.
12. Don't expect that everyone will agree with you and be happy about the outcome of the conference.

The Parent-Teacher Conference; Charles W. Edwards, College of Education, East Tennessee State University.

Tennessee Department of Education materials.

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Teacher-Parent Conferences
from
Teachers and Parents: A Guide to Interaction and Cooperation

Teacher-Parent Conferences. Individual conferences between teacher and parent permit maximum flexibility since most people communicate better in person than in writing. Verbal exchanges also decrease the possibilities of miscommunication since questions can be asked and points clarified. In addition, they allow teachers to support their comments about students with actual physical evidence (for example, samples of students' work). The standard teacher-parent conference is an excellent method for informing parents of their child's progress, but one requiring considerable preparation if it is to be successful. Table 1-3 is a brief outline for helping teachers prepare for such a conference.

To help organize the conference, teachers should prepare an agenda and give a copy to parents at the beginning of the conference or send one home beforehand. (See Table 1-4 for a sample agenda.) Before beginning a discussion of the child, teachers should review this agenda with parents, reminding them of the time limit agreed on when the meeting was scheduled.

The sample agenda in Table 1-4 includes all the information the teacher plans to share with the parents. Samples of the child's work in each subject area would also be provided, whenever possible. In communicating specific information about the child, teachers must be aware of the parents' needs; that is, they must listen to them carefully, answer their questions, explain each point thoroughly, and ask for confirming feedback.

Caution 1: interpretation of test scores and the reports of others. This can be a very delicate situation and should always be handled with the greatest care. First of all, labels derived from test results (for example, "retarded," "perceptually handicapped," "gifted," "learning disabled," "emotionally disturbed," or "artistically creative") seldom serve a useful function and should not be communicated to parents. In many cases, these labels result in altered expectations, differential treatment, and at times, gross discrimination. By law, this information can be supplied only by the school psychologist or the school administrator. If parents already know these labels, however, they will undoubtedly want to discuss them with the teacher. We advocate the use of behavioral descriptions for this task.

Secondly, parents have a basic right to see all information in their child's cumulative folder and to receive a clear explanation of its meaning and possible consequences. Before discussing with parents materials that could be potentially damaging, however, teachers should confer with their principal or supervisor to ensure that they present this information in the most appropriate manner.

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Finally, teachers must be very cautious in interpreting to parents information collected by other professionals (psychologists, social workers, and nurses, for example). They should never transmit this information as if it were their observation but report who actually made the analysis.

Caution 2: explanation of achievement tests. Most teachers feel very comfortable in giving parents the results of achievements tests; however, few ensure that parents understand the meaning of these scores. Grade equivalents, percentiles, and stanines make very little sense to most parents, and when these results are used to evaluate the effectiveness of one classroom versus another or one school district versus another, problems usually result. Parents should understand that the test score represents a child's standing in reference to the norm of the particular test, that it is only one measure of abilities, and that it only makes sense when compared with the child's daily performance in the classroom and in the home. The results from any one test should be handled very carefully since often they do not truly represent a child's ability. Daily observation in the classroom is generally a far superior method for evaluating a student's abilities.

Caution 3: timing of conferences. Teacher-parent conferences are most often scheduled for late afternoon, often an impossible time for both parents to attend. As Buskin (1975) points out, this results in one parent's feeling isolated and the other being burdened with the responsibility of explaining the conference discussion to the absent parent. When everything is going well, this can be a pleasant duty. When there are problems, however, the presence of both parents greatly increases the likelihood of finding a successful solution. Since the numbers of single-parent families and those in which both parents work are growing, we are very tempted to advocate that all teacher-parent conferences and meetings be scheduled in the early evening. Admittedly, having teachers work a fourteen-hour day is unrealistic. Nevertheless, parenting should be a partnership, and schools should do everything possible to encourage the full participation of all parents, we believe. Failing to do so will very likely result in an unsatisfactory resolution of the child's difficulties.

Rutherford and Edgar, 1979, pp. 9-12.

TABLE 1–3: Guide for Basic Information Conference

Purpose:	To inform parents of their children's progress in school.
Needs of Teacher:	To ensure parents understand how their children are doing.
Needs of Parents:	To find out how their children are performing, what they are learning, what activities they are engaged in, and what their teacher is like.
Preplanning by Teacher:	• Inform parents of purpose of meeting. • Agree on meeting time. • Collect samples of the children's work. • Prepare materials explaining teaching goals and strategies. • Schedule enough time for parents to ask questions and express concerns.
Materials:	• Daily schedule of classroom activities. • Checklist of skill areas and notes on how children are doing. • Samples of the children's work. • Test scores and reports from others on the children.

Rutherford and Edgar, 1979, p. 10.

TABLE 1–4: Sample Agenda for Monday's Conference (4:15 P.M.–4:45 P.M.)

General Impression of Johnny

Alert, talkative, happy, and well-liked. A good reader but needs work in spelling.

Academic Areas

Reading: Lippincott book D-mid second level. Advanced reading group. Good sounding-out skills. Great comprehension.

Arithmetic: Counts, writes numerals to 100, and understands addition and subtraction facts.

Writing: Manuscript—all upper and lower case letters. Nice creative stories.

Spelling: Needs some help in phonetic spelling; suggest place in special help group.

Art: Good creative work.

Music: A leader with gusto.

Science: Likes to tell about his "collections." Does he have bugs, spiders, and rocks?

Test Scores (IQ, Lorge Thorndike, and group test): Follows directions well.

Metropolitan Achievement Test: 2.8 on word attack skills, 2.9 on word meaning, and 2.1 on arithmetic.

Goals	How
Reading: To progress through beginning third grade level; should be able to read on own books like *A Little House on the Prairie.*	Reading group Language master Fifth grade tutor
Arithmetic: To add and subtract two-place numbers with renaming: $\begin{array}{r}46\\+75\end{array}$ $\begin{array}{r}74\\-28\end{array}$ Time, money: ($1.00, $5.00, $10.00, $25.00, $50.00, $100.00) Fractions: ½ ¼ ⅓.	Total group Seat work
Writing: To write all cursive letters.	Total group
Spelling: To spell all words on grade 3 test correctly.	Special help group
Art: To become familiar with pottery techniques.	Art teacher
Music: To become familiar with all the instruments of an orchestra.	Music teacher
Science: To become familiar with domestic and wild animals.	Experiments Group discussion
Social Activities: To know the rules of group games.	Playground Free time

Rutherford and Edgar, 1979, p. 11.

Other Resources

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Section VII

Especially for Support and Service Personnel

Everyone knows who is the most influential public relations person a school hires: the school secretary. The way the secretary answers the telephone, meets and greets parents, fields questions, attends to or ignores people standing at the desk, smiles or glares often creates a parent's first impression of school. Other support and service personnel--bus drivers, custodians, food service workers, and aides--are also an important part of a total school's communication to the home. This fact is immediately obvious to anyone working in or served by a school. Yet, in a recent survey of a random sample of service personnel in the Appalachian Region, only 7 percent of those responding had received any training related to working with parents. Nearly 35 percent of the respondents indicated they were interested in such training; 42 percent were not; and 23 percent did not respond to the question. Parent-related topics they were interested in were public relations (26%), parent-child interaction (24%), discipline (18%), and nutrition (14%). Most (almost 80%) of these same people reported that they communicate with parents on a regular basis about such topics as discipline, lunches, illness, school work, school activities, bus routes, and safety (Spriggs, 1983). Fifty-eight percent (58%) felt these talks were helpful to parents because as a result parents were better informed and understood a situation better. Support and service personnel also thought the talks improved communication between the home and school. They reported that their interactions with parents helped them understand the students and their parents better.

It is clear that support and service personnel influence and are a part of a school's relationship with the home. Consequently, they should receive some help in carrying out that aspect of their job.

Guides for Staff Development

Although there are thousands of service and support personnel in schools throughout the United States, there is very little research to tell us how to provide staff development on school-home relations and communications. The recommendations we are making have been inferred from AEL's survey data from what little information we found in the literature, and extensive discussions with school administrators and staff developers who work with service personnel. Sound principles of adult education--including motivation techniques--are included as appropriate.

Administrators set the expectations. An important method of staff development for service personnel is establishing high expectations and modeling appropriate behavior. Administrators should begin this in the hiring process. During the initial interview, ask questions such as, "In what ways do you see yourself involved in school-community relations?" and "What could you do to help school-family communication?" The administrator's expectations concerning that person's role and behavior as it impacts school-family communications should be made clear and specific before the person is hired. The administrator and other certified staff should also model respect, cordiality, friendliness, and diplomacy so that service personnel are constantly reminded of appropriate behavior.

That works for new hires, but most support and service personnel have been in the school system for a long time. Over half the respondents to AEL's survey had been employed in that district seven or more years. If service personnel need reminding or retraining in school-home-community relations, what should the school do?

Determine specific needs and conduct staff development activities to meet those needs. Use the needs assessment planning process outlined in Section III or in other resources to develop a program that teaches people what they need to know. Remember that for our purposes a "need" is defined as a mismatch between "what is" and "what is preferred" (Shively, 1982; Lentz, 1983). In the case of support and service personnel, "what is preferred" in terms of their role in school-family relations is usually unspecified. Their training is usually job-related (Spriggs, 1983). Moreover, schools and school administrators may be less than clear on "what is preferred." Some hard thinking and setting of priorities may be in order. In other words, the first step in staff development may not be with service personnel at all, but with parents, administrators, policy and advisory boards, and community people to obtain consensus on "what is preferred." This could be done at the same time priorities are set for certified school personnel. AEL has guides for the way schools can conduct needs assessments to establish those priorities and determine the discrepancies between what is and what should be. See Appendix D for a summary of the process and how to obtain complete information.

To get "what is" and "what is preferred" information from support and service personnel, as well as considerable insight into sources of problems and barriers, you may want to use a variety of measures, such as a small group discussion or "on the job" observation, rather than written surveys. One trainer experienced in teaching human relations skills to the drivers said she got much of her information from a regular ten-minute "open discussion" at the beginning of each staff development period. She could determine recurrent themes, nonproductive attitudes, and counterproductive rules laid down by the central office. Training cannot overcome behavior mandated by a supervisor!

Once needs have been identified, the rest of the planning process can proceed. Good staff development is effective with all people, so use the principles in Section III to guide planning and implementation.

Only a few general topics apply to all school personnel. The broad topics that apply to all school personnel--professional, paraprofessional, support and service--are:

A. Human Relations and School Climate

B. Working as a Team

C. Maintaining Confidentiality and School Ethics

D. Appropriateness of the Topics Discussed with Parents

A. Human Relations:

Some training in human relations could be done with the entire staff, especially to share schoolwide expectations of employees. For example, the Ten Commandments of Human Relations could be distributed, discussed, and posted where all staff can see them. People can help each other keep the commandments.

Ten Commandments of Human Relations

1. Speak to people. There is nothing as nice as a cheerful word of greeting.

2. Smile at people. It takes 72 muscles to frown, only 14 to smile.

3. Call people by name. The sweetest music to anyone's ears is the sound of his or her own name.

4. Be friendly and helpful.

5. Be cordial. Speak and act as if everything you do were a genuine pleasure.

6. Be genuinely interested in people. You can like everyone if you try.

7. Be generous with praise--cautious with criticism.

8. Be considerate with the feelings of others. It will be appreciated.

9. Be thoughtful of the opinion of others. There are three sides to a controversy--yours, the other fellow's, and the right one.

10. Be alert to give service. What counts most in life is what we do for others.

Much of the "affective" and human relations training that schools do can be adapted for all school personnel.

B. Build Team Spirit:

The entire staff, led by the administrator, can build and maintain a team spirit to support each other. Support and service personnel need to know they are a part of the total school program--including school-family relations--and that they are valued, appreciated, and depended on. Some of this can be done indirectly. Include them in parties and birthday celebrations; acknowledge their contributions in school newsletters; include them by name in the school handbook; and recognize specific praiseworthy behavior both orally and in writing.

Often parents and children do not know the names of specialists, support, and service personnel. Include them in the school handbook to help everyone. An example of the way one school did this is on the next page. The half page goes opposite the listing of teaching and administrative staff.

Clerical Staff

Miss Shirley Martin
Mrs. Bonnie Johnston

Custodial Staff

Mr. Alfred Locks

Lunchroom Staff

Mrs. Helen Saulcy

Aides

Mrs. Wanda Hace

Custodial Staff

Mr. Michael Matzke

Lunchroom Staff

Mrs. Lennie Cody
Mr. Lou Jesso

Aides

Mr. Tom Fields
Mrs. Jessie Kelly
Mr. Bob Smith
Mrs. Dolores Tafo
Mrs. Barbara Wiech
Ms. Jo Radell
Miss Vera Barnes

***Nurse**

Mrs. Bonnie C-perley
Wednesday & Friday

***Social Worker**

Mrs. Marlene Gibson
Tuesday & Friday

***Speech**

Miss Annette Bach
Monday P.M.

*Part-time staff

We encourage you to visit your child's class or the school and observe at any time. If you want a conference with your child's teacher, call the office to make an appointment. The number is 434-2122 or 434-2123.

Introduce all staff at open houses or "Back-to-School" night, and acknowledge their special contributions. One school secretary, asked by a couple of strangers how to find a specific room in a rather confusing building, simply took them. Along the way, she pointed out the interesting and educationally sound activities that were going on. The strangers turned out to be local television reporters scouting a good story. They got it! Lets hope the secretary also got a letter of commendation--or at least a note of appreciation in her box.

Parent-teacher organizations, student councils, and other groups can also show appreciation of service personnel to help create a cohesive group

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working toward the same goals--which include good home-school relations as an integral part of school operations.

One large school district recently named a new school building after a custodian who had been with the system 46 years--starting in high school as a "sweeper," and advancing to a supervisor's position in Personnel Services. In accepting the honor, the custodian said, "I'm happy that I was picked to represent all those backup people within the school system--the clerks, the secretaries, the cooks, the bus drivers, the custodians, the people who help the schools run. These are the people who register the kids, feed the kids, fix up the building when something breaks down. In the past they've recognized teachers, principals, and school board presidents. I'm glad that finally they're recognizing the rest of us, too" (Bingham, 1984, p. A-2). No one could have better expressed the importance of all the team.

Special training in school-home communications is another way to recognize the importance of all school personnel in maintaining productive relations with families. Administrators and teachers should keep service personnel informed of all notices, special events, or changes that might affect them. If some parents are coming for lunch, let the lunchroom staff know! If a parent organization has special needs for night meetings, let the custodian know. These communications positively influence the way staff communicate with parents. Administrators should attend at least some of the inservice training for each group. The presence of a person in an administrative position at a staff development meeting for service personnel gives that meeting the status and credibility it can get in no other way.

C. Maintain Confidentiality and School Ethics:

"Don't tell tales out of school" applies to all people working in the school setting. AEL's research shows that service and support personnel talk regularly with parents. Some of this conversation may be informal and in settings outside of the school, such as occurs in small towns or rural communities where everybody knows everybody, creating the "support network" characteristic of such communities. But whether in or out of the school setting, everyone working in a school needs to know that they have privileged information. They need to know that information about certain incidents and situations does not leave the school building. Anyone working in a school learns much about children, families, and the other staff. Frequently what they know is only part of the total picture, and a lot of damage can be done by idle gossip or discussion. All school people need to be reminded of professional ethics.

Hypothetical examples specific to the various positions people hold will help make abstract concepts such as "confidentiality," "privileged information," "discretion," and "privacy" real and applicable to the everyday decisions they make.

D. Appropriateness of Topics to Discuss With Parents:

Support and service personnel reported that they talked with parents about school work, discipline, and school activities, as well as topics specifically related to their service area, such as lunches and bus safety. It may be that service personnel need training in what is appropriate to discuss, and what they do if a parent brings up homework, grades, discipline problems, and other concerns specific to individual children and families. Service personnel may need coaching in how to diplomatically refer a parent to the teacher or principal, as well as knowing when to do so. They should know how a parent can contact the school, and know what topics are "off-limits" to discuss. Make examples specific to the situation the person is likely to be caught in. For example, what is an aide to say if a parent asks "How is Shawn really doing?" What is the custodian to say if an old friend asks, "What really happened in that fight out on the playground? My kid says one thing and the principal says something else?"

Training Specific to Specialized Areas

Most staff development for support and service personnel should be specific to their particular areas. Local administrators can do much to set expectations by meeting separately with each group at the beginning of each year. While this technique can be likened to "preventive" staff development, it may be more effective than "picking up the pieces."

We have not prepared examples of inservice training sessions as we did for teachers and principals. Rather, we are making recommendations and suggestions to guide the development of training sessions to meet locally identified needs and situations.

Know the community and job situation of the people you are working with. The driver of a small van that bounces along a gravel road to deliver ten children to farms spread out over 15 or 20 miles has a different relationship to the school and families than the employee of a company that has a contract with the school to transport 60 children per bus through heavy city traffic. Their training needs may be quite different. In many communities, bus drivers have more contact and communication with parents than any other school person.

In some schools, lunch money and lunch tickets are handled by the teachers; in others, by the lunch manager in the school. If food service personnel are dealing directly with parents and children on free or reduced-payment lunches, forgotten or lost lunch money or tickets, they'll need many skills in diplomacy and judgment. If a school is beginning a program of inviting parents to lunch or breakfast on a given day, food service personnel may need help in planning how to handle these extra people so that everyone remains gracious and welcoming.

Much training should be situation-specific. Highly educated teachers have difficulty transferring general information to their classroom situation (Bruce & Showers, 1983). Planners of staff development for service personnel must make general principles as specific, concrete, and directly applicable to a person's job situation as possible.

One way to help do this is to take over another's duties or work along with the other staff people for a day. Some high-level executives and elected officials make it a regular practice to anonymously take the position of their employees or constituents for a day. Since most staff development planners have come up through the ranks of teachers, they might gain valuable insights by stepping into another job to find out what it is really like.

Use a wide variety of training techniques. Because of the small number of custodians, secretaries, bus drivers, and other support staff in any one building or area, training may need to be somewhat different from that of certified personnel. Some staff development can be individualized. For example, one effective administrator watches for local offerings on telephone skills and public relations for secretaries, such as those sponsored by local businesses or management seminars. Another individualized technique is to arrange for a staff member to visit and work with a colleague in another school who can model and demonstrate the desired human relations attitudes and skills. Support and service staff like to get out of the building to see what other people in similar positions are doing. This provides valuable learning opportunities, in the same way that teachers learn from a visitation day or conference.

Keep concepts and goals simple and specific. "Always smile and say 'hello' to people coming into the building" may have more impact than long discussions about human relations.

Coach the night custodians (and others) to ask "May I help you?" "Refer parents to the teacher or principal when they ask about school discipline or grades" is a simple policy which is clear.

Teach service personnel how to talk with and guide children constructively. Bus drivers, for example, often have charge of as many children as a classroom teacher. Drivers need to be able to talk and discipline children in a way that is effective but not harsh. A communication to the children is one to the home, also.

Remember that support and service personnel in some communities may be closer to parents and homes than teachers and administrators. If there are cultural, ethnic, or language differences, support and service personnel may help narrow those differences. They may know what parents and the community are thinking and feeling long before teachers and administrators do. Solicit their insights and perceptions. Sometimes they are short on training but long on wisdom. Staff development can supply training to complement the wisdom.

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Section VIII

Especially for Families

Most home-school communications are about an individual child's progress in school or general information about policies, dates, people, and other school matters. But families need and are interested in other kinds of information, education, and involvement as well.

If there is anything that we have learned about school-home relations, it is that there are many ways for schools and homes to cooperate, and that no one way is "superior." They accomplish different purposes. Almost always schools, families, and children benefit.

All aspects of family functioning influence children's performance in school. Death, drugs, abuse, unemployment, poverty, and hunger can cripple even the best teachers' and schools' efforts. Other more subtle factors also influence family effectiveness: Is the household at least moderately well-organized? Do parents know how to provide for their child's development and safety? Talk and play with the child? Get the TV off so older children can study and younger ones get to bed? Know how to use available community resources, including the school, to strengthen and enrich family life and their child's education and development?

Some families--frequently those whose children do well in school--seem to do these things "naturally." But many others do not. Some families have special needs--handicapped children or a traumatic change in family structure following death, divorce, or remarriage. Families caught in a cycle of low educational achievement and poverty also have special needs in relation to the school (Gotts, 1984).

In this section are ideas and resources appropriate for schools to use to help families function more effectively. Some are related directly to children's performance in school, such as suggestions for "tote bags" to help youngsters organize their school work and personal belongings. Others are indirect, such as making available brochures, booklets, and sources of information on all aspects of family life in a "Family Information Center" or "Parent Resource Room." We give samples, sources, and suggestions for use. As a continuation of our approach throughout this Resource Notebook, we urge you to continue to revise as new material becomes available, sources become obsolete, and as local strengths and needs indicate.

We are not suggesting that schools become all things to the family. Rather, we are suggesting that in their communications with families, schools can do much to strengthen them. A narrow focus on the family only in relation to Shawn's arithmetic and Keri's spelling denies reality.

Many of the activities we suggest can be organized and implemented by a volunteer committee of parents and school staff. Such a process has been carried out and documented by the Special Needs Families Project at AEL (Snow, 1984). Details of the process and the results are available on request. The Special Needs Families Project has also compiled much information on Parent Resource Centers, some of which is included here. More is available from AEL.

Some of these activities can be implemented by an active parent-teacher organization or parent-advisory council. An energetic media specialist, media aide, home economics or 4-H group could organize and maintain a parent resource center. As far as that goes, an individual teacher can do much; a team even more. Some of the ideas would make good parent workshops; others are appropriate to include in school newsletters. All are "Especially for Families."

Newsletters and Newsbriefs

Newsletters are one of the most effective and widely used forms of communication from school to home (Gotts, 1984). Usually, newsletters and newsbriefs concentrate on school-related news, notices, and general information. However, many schools include features that speak directly to parents and families and suggest how families might help with homework, draw attention to special television shows or community events coming up (make sure the newsletters will arrive before the date passes!), or highlight community resources such as a museum, computer fair, sports events, music festival, or children's theater. Put such information in a feature or column "Especially for Families," have it in a consistent place every time, and you'll have readers. Make the items specific to the age group you are concerned with. Story hour at the library or bookmobile might be of interest to a few parents of middle school children, but very few! Speak to the needs and interests of the families you are dealing with. Include such items as:

- Timely reprints from newspapers, magazines, brochures, or other information. Be sure to ask permission and give credit! The PTA magazine frequently carries short articles directed to parents. We have included examples of suitable short features which you may reprint. There are more everywhere, as education, parents, and children receive much national and local news coverage. Consider asking one of your own staff to write the feature. It will have special meaning.

- Local events, festivals, fairs, and other activities appropriate for families to attend may spark some of the home "field trips" that both strengthen the family and help children in school.

- Consider including selected information about community resources that families might turn to if they need special help, such as immunization clinics, health screenings, drug and alcohol support groups, parent education classes and workshops, adult basic education, personal and family time management and organization, budgeting and food preparation, stress management, or family health and exercise programs.

Formal and informal needs assessments--and a good knowledge of and sensitivity to the families in your community--often show topics or areas of concern that schools cannot address. If other community agencies do offer such services, schools can help those organizations reach the people who would benefit. Everyone wins! Check board policy on what can be included. Offerings by non-profit organizations should be appropriate.

Of course, many large districts offer extensive adult education classes that strengthen individual and family ability to manage their lives. Sometimes the complete listing is in a district-wide community newsletter and can be overwhelming. Pick out some of special interest to the families you work with and highlight them in a building newsletter or classroom newsbrief. Be sure to include information on cost and where and how they get signed up. Don't assume that "everyone" knows.

Examples of short articles and features "Especially for Families". AEL has obtained releases for you to reproduce any of these articles and has put them on a separate page to make that reproduction easy. We do ask that you include the credits as a courtesy. Some are directly related to school-family concerns; others are indirect. Pick and choose the ones that meet the needs and interests of the families in your community. If you don't have a newsletter, post them on a bulletin board, reproduce them as flyers for the parent resource center, or on the back of the school or class calendar.

How to Work With a School

by Oralie McAfee
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Denver, Colorado

For most children, the end of summer signifies a new school and new teacher, whether it's nursery school, a child-care center, elementary, middle or high school. The wise parent will get to know that school and that child's teachers, so school and home can work together.

"But how?" you ask. You're busy, the teachers are busy, and you aren't sure that schools really want parents around, anyway.

Not so. Most schools seek closer cooperation with homes, especially in this time of tight budgets and increased expectations. School administrators, teachers and secretaries suggest the following "pointers for parents" who want better communication:

- Get acquainted with people in the school early in the year. Don't wait for a problem to arise.

- If possible, visit the school. That will help you know more about the way the school is organized, the way the rooms are arranged and the children grouped.

  It helps to know where your child will be and the kind of organization he or she will be in.

  If you can't visit, use the telephone to introduce yourself to the secretary, teacher and principal. Most schools have certain hours when teachers can be reached by telephone. Post the school's number in a handy place so you don't have to look it up every time.

  Find out whether teachers and administrators want you to make an appointment or just drop by. If you make an appointment, but sure to keep it.

- Have a friendly tone in your voice, a sincere smile and something positive to say, even if it is followed by something not so positive. If you are confident and supportive, other people are likely to react the same way.

- Remember that teachers, principals, and other school people are human. Treat them as individuals, not as stereotypes. For example, learn and use their names.

- Support the school's effort to keep parents informed and involved. Read and keep in a convenient place information from the school, such as the school calendar, handbook and notices. If a response is asked for, respond. Go to parent-teacher conferences, open houses and meetings. Many schools recognize that parents work away from home during the day and schedule conferences and meetings at times today's parents can attend. If your school doesn't, request it.

- Try to take care of a problem of concern closest to its source. Talk to the teacher first, then the principal. If you are not satisfied with these responses, find out who you should see or what you should do next. Most districts have procedures for you to follow.
- Call or go to school looking for solutions, not someone to blame. If you are really upset at your child, the teacher or the school, take time to cool down before doing or saying anything. Think and talk about problems and solutions, not personalities. Try to see the whole picture before placing blame or responsibility on anyone.
- Be sure to keep the school up to date on your telephone number, work or address changes and how to reach you in an emergency.
- If something happens at home that might influence the way your child acts at school, let the teacher know. Maybe someone is in the hospital or has lost a job or there is a divorce. Children worry about those things, and teachers will be more understanding if they know.
- Get to know your older children's schools, too. Parents often show a lot of interest in what their first-grader does, but leave their adolescent's schooling strictly up to them. Teen-agers might not want Mom or Dad visiting class, but you and they need to work closely with the school on college and career requirements and on their academic progress.
- Get to know other parents in the school. Working together, you can help strengthen and preserve the many excellent things schools are doing and let teachers, principals and school boards know that you appreciate and value that excellence.

How to talk to a teacher

by George S. Morrison,
Professor of Education,
Florida International University

Mrs. Gilbert has just come home after a busy day at work. As she sits down to relax for a minute before preparing dinner, the phone rings.

"Hello, Mrs. Gilbert? This is Mary Logan, Tommie's teacher. I'd like to discuss a few things with you. Have a minute?"

Panic! "Oh, no, what has he done now? What am I going to say?" thinks Mrs. Gilbert.

Meanwhile, across town, Juan Garcia has sat down to dinner. He asks his children, "How did things go at school today?" His inquiry is greeted with mumbled assurances of "OK..."

His youngest daughter, Ana, suddenly says, "Oh, Papa, I forgot to tell you. I have a note from my teacher; she wants to have a conference with you or Mommie." Mr. Garcia gets a knot in his stomach. "A conference? What for? What about?" Ana shrugs her shoulders and replies, "I don't know."

These scenes of uncertainty about parent-teacher communication are not uncommon. Parents are faced with the need to talk to their children's teachers but don't know what to say or how to say it.

This insecurity cuts across cultures and socioeconomic lines but is probably most common in parents who have little contact with schools or feel alienated from them.

Parents who have been rebuffed or treated unfairly in previous attempts in talking with teachers are not likely to greet enthusiastically an invitation to come to school for a conference. But even parents without such experiences may feel tension.

The following guidelines are designed to help relieve anxiety and improve communication with teachers.

☐ *Develop interest and involvement in your child's school, programs, activities, and curriculum.*

Responsibility for being interested in the school, classroom activities, and program of studies comes with being a parent. When children know their parents are interested, they are motivated to do their best. Also, when parents are interested in their children's classes, they have something to talk about with their children and their children's teachers. Finally, teachers are attentive and responsive to parents who show an interest in their children.

☐ *Don't think you are wasting a teacher's time.* Instead, act as though you expect teachers to give you the time needed to answer questions and to develop a program so your children can succeed.

Sometimes parents are afraid they are "bothering" the teacher when they ask for help. But many teachers welcome the chance to talk about how to improve the teaching-learning process and parent-teacher relationships.

☐ *Initiate communication with teachers and school administrators.* The beginning of this article described parents who waited for teachers to get in touch with them. Many parents assume that if they don't hear from the teacher, everything is all right, but this may not be the case. Parents should take the initiative and talk with teachers before it is necessary for teachers to talk to them.

Some teachers may never contact the parents. Or when they do, it may be too late to help the child. A problem can be handled best in its early stages. Unfortunately, parents are usually contacted when a behavior problem has become serious or the lack of achievement is leading to grade failure.

Parents should contact teachers a few weeks after school has started and immediately after every grading period.

Make an appointment to visit the teacher rather than just showing up at school. If you have difficulty getting a conference with a teacher, don't hesitate to get help from the school administration. A principal can work wonders in clearing up obstacles that may be preventing a parent from getting to see a teacher.

☐ *Communicate with teachers on a regular basis and in a variety of ways.*

You can write notes or make a phone call. Some parents invite the teacher to their homes for dinner or dessert; others include teachers in a family or neighborhood barbecue.

Out-of-school encounters benefit teachers as well as parents. They enable teachers to talk with parents less formally. Sharing information enables them to understand children in the total family situation, not just as students in school.

Don't be concerned about whether other parents are doing the same things to communicate with teachers.

☐ *Develop a plan before talking with teachers.* Develop a plan so you don't forget important points and ideas. Make a list that includes questions relating to what is being studied, homework, classroom interests, achievement, and other topics about your child's progress.

When you want to discuss your children's work and achievement, take sample papers along. You can include activities and work done at home as well as at school. Work samples give parents and teachers a basis for talking about a child's abilities and can help resolve misconceptions that may exist as to what can and should be learned.

☐ *Make contacts with school and teacher a positive experience.*

Start with a positive attitude. Don't go to school expecting trouble or a confrontation. Rather, expect to help and be helped. Negative attitudes have a way of clouding issues and interfering with the cooperative process of parent and teacher working together for the common good of children.

☐ *When your child has a problem, get help from teachers, administrators, and specialists.*

Sometimes teachers make parents feel as though the solution to a child's learning or behavior problem is solely the parent's problem. Teachers may say the child's achievement or behavior problems are caused by too much TV, a poor attitude toward school, child-rearing patterns, diet, etc. These factors may or may not contribute to the problem. Parents should encourage teachers to focus on helping them and their children by asking such questions as, "How do you suggest we begin?" "What are you going to do about it?"

Teachers should assume a major role in helping develop a program that will lead to enhanced learning and behavior. Ask teachers to refer you to other school and community agencies and services for help in developing solutions if a problem is beyond their ability to help. Many community agencies can provide specialized services free or at a nominal fee.

☐ *Treat teachers as consultants.* Teachers have knowledge and ideas that can help you and your children. They are trained in education methods, learning theories, behavior management, and child development. They don't have all the answers to your children's problems, but their background and experiences make them experts in many areas. Questions such as, "Do you feel this behavior is abnormal for this grade and age level?" and "How do you suggest I handle this?" enable you to take advantage of the teacher's knowledge.

If you anticipate a potential problem, ask for suggestions about how to handle it. For example, the death of a grandparent, parent, or sibling may be close at hand. Asking the teacher for advice about how to handle this situation also alerts the teacher to a potential problem.

☐ *Follow up on all communications and visits.* Parents need to follow through on contacts they have with teachers and to follow up afterwards. Teachers get discouraged when they make efforts to help parents and never hear anything about the results.

Following these guidelines will increase your chances of successful teacher-parent interactions. Children will benefit as a result, and that is the real purpose of education. ☐

Dr. Morrison is professor of education and director of the Center for Family and Parent Studies, Florida International University.

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HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH STUDY SKILLS*

- Do not ask questions that call for yes/no answers, especially if asked accusingly. Instead, pose questions requiring explanations that not only keep you posted but also help your student say how he or she will complete an assignment. For instance, don't ask, "Didn't you have a chapter to read in Social Studies?" Instead, ask, "How do you plan to read and study that chapter in Social Studies?"

- Know your son's or daughter's schedule of classes. Then you will be better able to ask specific questions on content, assignments and study techniques.

- Help provide a regular, well-equipped place for study that is free of interruptions. Some types of music do help concentration. Chores, phone calls, and drop-in visitors should not occur during study time.

- Learn about and help your son or daughter practice good time management. It is not the amount of time but the quality of time used that produces effective results. Students achieve quality use of time by understanding assignments, having a plan to complete them efficiently by blocking time periods for studying and completing specific assignments, and by doing important things first.

- Discuss specific study techniques your child uses in reading assignments and completing homework. Some skills, such as scanning for key words, apply to many subject areas, but plotting information in word problems in math may be a single subject area skill. Find out what the teacher is suggesting and use those approaches.

- Have your student demonstrate the way he or she takes notes in different subject areas, how he prepares for various kinds of tests, and how she plans her time and uses different skills in long-term assignments. You may be able to make some suggestions for improvement.

- Once your son or daughter has identified a study problem, work with your student in arriving at a solution. Some schools have study skills booklets, or there are commercial study skills books you may wish to explore. Ask your school.

- Good study skills should become habits. They take time to learn and master, as do learning to swim or to type. After your child has mastered the skills, he/she can apply them naturally to save time and to be more successful. Be sure to praise your son or daughter when they use good study habits.

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*Adapted and used courtesy of Dr. Charles McLain, Jefferson County Schools, Colorado.

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TWENTY TIPS FOR TAMING--AND TEACHING WITH--TV

compiled by Oralie McAfee

Ten Tips for Taming

1. Put TV in an out-of-the-way place.
2. Have interesting things to do that are more attractive than the television show.
3. Be a good model. Limit your own TV watching.
4. Discuss shows and commercials with your children.
5. Agree with your children on the amount of time they will watch per day, then let them choose from selected shows the ones they want to watch.
6. Explain to them why you don't want them to watch too much, or why you don't want them to watch certain shows.
7. Be firm in sticking by your decisions, but don't argue.
8. Don't use "all right, just for that you can't watch TV" as punishment.
9. Select specific good shows to watch. Turn on TV to watch them, then turn it off. Don't leave it on as background.
10. Praise children when they are involved in activities other than watching television.

Ten Tips for Teaching

1. Select programs carefully.
2. Watch and talk about them with your child and the whole family.
3. Watch and support your local educational television station.
4. Prepare for and follow-up interesting programs with related books, articles, and activities.
5. Talk about and help children separate make-believe and real life.
6. Talk about different ways TV characters could solve their problems.
7. Use TV to help children learn letters, numbers, and words.
8. Compare the newspaper report of a specific news event with the television report.
9. Compare the news stories with real life.
10. Relate television shows to what the children are studying--geography, history, social studies, science, literature and so on.

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Building and Maintaining Children's Physical Fitness

by Francis Wardle

The slim, athletic looking woman holds a drink to her lips and advertises a diet cola. A healthy young sportsman pushes an exercise program. We are encouraged to run in a marathon, join a health club, and ride a bike. Exercise books are top sellers. This country is physical fitness crazy.

Or is it?

When it comes to our children, experts say "No." Research shows our children are in poorer physical health than children from past generations, and children living in other countries. And these experts are worried. Ironically, as we have increased our concern for physical fitness for adults, our children's physical welfare has declined. Why?

Reasons seem to include lots of television watching, reduction of physical education programs in schools and day-care centers because of the stress on providing basic subjects, working parents who come home too exhausted to provide physical activities for their children, and the current adult craze for physical fitness. Yes, we Americans take trends so seriously that many adults who are actively involved in keeping their bodies in shape have less time to spend with their children.

There are steps parents can take to assure their childrens' physical health:

- Recognize that proper physical development is as important as proper intellectual, emotional, and social development.
- When you exercise, include the kids. Jog with them, cycle with them, walk with them, hike and swim with them. Choose a health club that encourages participation of children and provides for physical activities for children of all ages.
- Demand that programs your children attend--day care, school, after school care, etc.--provide regular quality physical education experiences for all children.
- Take children to playgrounds on a regular basis, or build one in your backyard.
- Make physical activity a regular family experience. Hike, cycle, swim, canoe, dance, and climb. At the same time, limit the time your children watch TV. This is only effective if the children have alternative activities to pursue.

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- Kicking a ball in the backyard, playing tag, putting up a volleyball net, and throwing a ball back and forth are close family activities that parents can do with their children, especially during Colorado's cool summer evenings.

- Use community resources. Community centers offer gymnastics, dance classes, and sports activities for all ages. There are soccer teams, little league, etc. Ballet and folk dancing offered by community centers and schools provides a good form of disciplined exercise. Not only is this excellent exercise, but children gain a sense of self-confidence by performing.

- Analyze your weekly schedule. Is there any place where you could walk with your children, rather than ride--to the babysitter, store, church, playground? Maybe you could walk twice a week. Also, when time permits, park a little farther away from the store, movie theater, or school.

Children learn a great deal of enjoyment from physical activities. They also learn skills that will help them in other areas. Dance teaches a love of music and sense of rhythm and sequence. When climbing, children learn about nature, weather, and challenge. Sports teach rules about group activities. But the most important thing is the children are developing physical ability and potential.

In our family we avoid competitive activities and activities inappropriate to our childrens' physical development. Select free and inexpensive activities the entire family can enjoy together.

Habits children develop early in life will continue into adulthood. Walking, jogging, cycling, strolling through the dusk for a relaxing evening, and hiking the mountains as a family will have a lasting impact on children and transfer to their adult lives.

Parents must provide the model for these experiences--and they must be started when the child is young. Don't suddenly expect your 15-year-old to want to go climbing, or walk to the movie theater, but many are responsive to the same physical fitness approaches that appeal to adults.

The Backyard Can Be "Back to Nature"

By Sheri S. Williams

You don't have to be a veteran backpacker to enjoy nature with your child. Few of us need to know which wild plants are edible or how to read a topographic map. All you need is a curious mind and your inquisitive child.

A good place to begin your explorations is in your own backyard. Here is a place where your child can observe nature in its routine. When your child asks, "How do birds fly?" don't let that teachable moment pass.

Point out the bird's streamlined form to your child. Then compare your child's form to that of the bird's. When your child brings you a snake from the creek, place it in the red wagon while you explain the difference between a poisonous rattler and a harmless garter snake. There are few better moments to provide this kind of instruction.

You can increase your child's understanding of nature with simple discoveries such as these:

- Find out why a fish doesn't sink in the stream.
- Watch spiders spin a web and catch their prey.
- Discover where lightning most often strikes.
- Study animal droppings and footprints for clues to wildlife in the area.

Your child won't mind if you're not an accomplished student of nature. Even members of the Audubon Society have an occasional lapse in recall. Don't hesitate to carry along a pocket reference to help identify the birds, flowers, and animal tracks found along the nature trail.

If you plan to go to the woods, national or state parks, or a nearby stream to advance your nature study, brief your child with some safety tips. Purchase a kid's survival kit.

When your nature trip begins, encourage your children to ask questions about what they see. Whether you take an introductory walk through the park or an extended hike through the woods, look for signs of life. Note which grasses are shorter. Look for clearings where wildlife is evident. Mark the path where you travel by pointing out landmarks such as the prominent hill along the trail.

For more extensive nature studies, check out a complete reference guide from your branch library. One useful reference is "Exploring Nature With Your Child." In this 440-page book, author Dorothy Edwards Shuttlesworth combines her experience with her own children with her work as editor of the Junior National History Magazine. The National Wildlife Federation, State Divisions of Wildlife, National Geographic Magazine all have many resources for children, as do Scouts, Campfire Girls, and 4-H.

Remember to take your cameras. Seeing nature through a youngster's eyes can increase the discoveries that can be made.

Guides and reference books can help make your introduction to nature more enjoyable. With simple explorations beginning in your own back yard, nature study will become an adventure worth taking for you and your child.

Help Your Child Get Organized for Success in School

By Bonnie McCullough

Help your child get organized for school.

It is a good stepping stone for responsibility, it will help the child to be a better student, and it will improve his self-concept by handling homework and little details like school notices and permission slips.

Help your children keep track of their things by putting their names on everything from notebooks to mittens. Markers work on many surfaces, and gummed address labels are convenient for others. Order fabric name labels from local fabric shops and stitch them in coats, hats and gloves. It takes such a little time but the returns on lost, stolen, and misplaced items are terrific.

Start the "bag habit." Have the child take a backpack or tote bag to school. The children put notes to parents, finished work, permission slips, and library books in their bags to be taken home at the end of the day. At home, the bags became the "gathering point" for things to be returned to school.

The amazement comes as those children advance through their elementary years and maintain the habit. Success at school depends on how you organize and keep track of papers and things as well as on how much you know. Most children take school seriously and want to succeed at it. A simple vehicle such as the bag helps the children get organized and increases confidence in their ability to handle the school experience. Luckily, backpacks and tote bags are in. Help your child get started off on a good foot and begin reinforcing this pattern early in the year. You will need to establish an acceptable place for the bag to be kept at home.

Keep a family calendar on which you correlate activities and commitments. Encourage your child to transfer his or her school business onto the calendar: minimal days, photos, parties, field trips, practices, rehearsals and meetings. Children can begin this time management skill early and reap the rewards their whole lives.

One family made the children responsible for getting up and off to school from the beginning without parental prodding. The family tradition was to purchase an alarm clock for each child when he started school. If the child had difficulty getting up, the alarm clock was the bad guy, not the parent. These children were learning personal responsibility.

Children do not have enough intrinsic motivation to do homework on their own. Parents should not take over or do the actual work for the child, but there are three basics: time, place,and support.

Create an environment where learning is convenient. Provide a table or desk, good lighting, and proper suplies (paper, pen, pencil, dictionary, atlas, etc.)

As a parent, be available to discuss or support. Do not take over. Instead of telling the child what to do, help him or her see what to do. Try the questioning technique: "What homework do you have tonight?" "When do you plan on doing it?" "Will you be needing any assistance?" Don't ride your kids--there is a difference between hassling and encouraging.

Designate a time for homework. It is so hard to "find" time and much easier to have work periods set aside. Daily short sessions are better than one long cramming session. Keep them 30 minutes or less until the child's interest and aptitude increase. Since Friday is the day most reports are due and quizzes take place, it may be necessary to schedule some of your adult time to practice spelling words or proof reports on Thursday evening. For sure, don't rent a movie or turn on TV and expect the kids to do homework while you are watching.

Look over your child's papers when they are sent home, be interested in what the child is studying and how the papers are marked.

Encourage your children to succeed at school without doing their work for them and you'll be initiating patterns of life-long success.

Reprinted courtesy of Bonnie McCullough and the Denver Post. Additional material on home and family life by Bonnie McCullough includes:

Bonnie's Household Organizer, 1983
Bonnie's Budget Book, 1983
401 Ways to Get Your Kids to Work at Home, 1982 (with Susan Manson)
76 Ways to Get Organized for Christmas, 1982

All are available from St. Martin's Press, New York, New York.

Totes, Packs, and Other Organizers

"Not too many years ago, a sturdy school bag with a handle; pockets for pencils, crayons, a ruler; and compartments for papers and books was an essential part of growing up and going to school. The school bag, carried from home to school and back by the child, linked the two institutions that were concerned with his or her growth and learning" (Nedler & McAfee, 1979). Old fashioned school bags are not in style and have absolutely no status, but tote bags, day packs, bicycle packs, and small back packs definitely are "in." Schools and families can take advantage of that trend to:

- establish a regular communication system between home and school;
- emphasize that neither home nor school can work alone;
- unobtrusively get reading material, paper, pencils, and other essential study tools into homes that lack them; and
- help the youngster and the home get organized for home study and for getting essential materials back and forth in an organized way. Anyone who has ever been outside a school building on a windy day or has peeked inside a school bus on any day has seen the futility of sending home loose papers. Older children have sports gear and personal items, as well as books and papers to keep organized.

In some communities and schools, suggesting that each child have a tote bag or pack clearly labeled with his or her name may be all that is needed. Send home a copy of the article, "Help Your Child Get Organized for Success in School," on the previous page to tell parents how to use the bag or pack and give other tips for organizing as well. You may reproduce the article.

In some schools, a more organized effort may be needed, as parents may not have money or motivation to act on a suggestion. If your school is increasing homework expectations, sending more books, messages, and samples of children's homework, or trying to encourage parents to communicate with the school, consider the following ways to encourage a home-school bag for every child.

- Encourage the student council, parent-teacher organization, or another school group to consider this as a project. Sturdy tote bags are not expensive, and they can easily be imprinted with the school name, slogan, or symbol to help build school pride and spirit. Sell them for enough profit to provide every child with one. Write the child's name on the bag in prominent letters before it leaves school. Permanent ink,felt tip pens will provide a quick and lasting identification.

- Get a group of parents together to make bags for every child. The raw material is not expensive, and the problem of "haves" and "have-nots" doesn't come up. An art teacher, art student, or one of the parents talented in art can set up the silk screening process to identify the school. In addition to accomplishing a worthwhile project, parents will enjoy the fun and fellowship of working together. Such a project may not have the "high-tech" glamour of raising money for a microcomputer, but may have a greater impact on children's success in school.

- If all else fails, the school can use heavy duty manila envelopes for sending work home. Sometimes called "Friday envelopes," there is no reason they can't be used more often. The school name or logo on the outside is nice, but not essential. The child's name is.

- Youngsters in secondary schools present a different challenge. In all likelihood, they are going to carry whatever is the current fad at their schools. Student council, school leaders, or school traditions may help them develop and use the back pack, casually slung over one shoulder, to organize their material, but peer influence is more likely to prevail.

Parent Information or Resource Centers

Parent information or resource centers can range all the way from a bulletin board with a pocket chart for pamphlets to a highly organized library with books, cassettes, learning materials for parents and children, and filmstrips organized and run by a person skilled in parent education. Whether simple or elaborate, the purpose is the same: To provide parents with information that will increase their knowledge and skill in family living, child development, and child education.

Both the concept and its implementation are quite straightforward and relatively simple to carry out. The idea is that parents often lack the information they need about family life, child rearing, home management, guiding, disciplining, and enjoying children as they grow and develop, as well as other things you have to know and do to create a family that nurtures all its members. If they have the information, they will be able to put it into practice. Now, such an assumption may or may not be correct, but families certainly can't apply any information without having it! And that is what Parent Information Centers or Parent Resource Centers supply.

Creating an attractive and inviting "parent space" in the lobby, front hall, or an empty classroom is a powerful communication to parents in and of itself. It says:

> Come in! You are welcome here! Sit down, relax, and visit with us for a few minutes. This school values you and your family, and knows that we need each other to educate children. If you are interested in and would like to read one of the pamphlets, take it. You can check out a book or a cassette tape to take home for more information.

Such resource centers are usually found in early childhood or elementary schools where parents come in relatively often. Since parents go to secondary schools less often, a general parent information center might not be appropriate. However, parents do come to school for open houses, college nights, and special events. Tables with "take one" information items on school, family, and child concerns might be worth experimenting with. Families of adolescents have no less need for relevant information than those with young children; their need may simply be different. An information or resource center should be as close and convenient to parents as possible--preferably in the school where their children go. One center in the district office won't do it. In rural areas, consider working with the local library system and the bookmobile service, as well as featuring the resource center at special events.

How does an administrator, a group of parents and teachers, a media specialist, or whoever is the organizing group get started? As stated earlier, AEL has in-depth guidelines and research on how to involve families with special needs in planning, organizing, and implementing such a program.

Use the following steps as a guide:

1. Organize a small working committee. Be sure to include parents and the school principal. If families of older children are to be involved, the children may have excellent insights on what parents may want or need to know.

2. Refer to the results of any family and community needs assessment to determine what families would like to know more about. If such information is not available, AEL has a carefully designed and tested questionnaire that you might want to use. It is available in both Spanish and English versions. An English version can be found in Appendix F and may be reproduced for local use.

   A representative sample of parents of young children from ten states answered the questions, showing that their priorities for learning more about children were in the area of intellectual and personal development of children, as shown in the following chart.

ITEM	PERCENT OF PARENTS RESPONDING		
	"A lot more"	"A little more"	"Nothing more at all"
Help your child see and accept his or her own feelings.	54.6	37.0	8.3
How your child's personality is formed.	47.7	39.8	12.4
Talk with your child about his problems and answer his questions.	48.2	37.8	13.8
How the world looks and sounds to your child and how to help him learn about it.	45.1	43.7	11.0
What your child should be able to learn at his age, so as not to "push" your child too much.	43.7	43.7	12.5
Help your child to behave when he starts to fight.	45.6	39.9	14.4
What ways of teaching will work best with your child (the way you teach; use of books, TV).	39.0	48.8	12.1

Perceived needs of parents for knowledge related to effective parenting (from Coan, 1976, p. 94)

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Local results or results from parents of older children may be different. Consider using card sorts, the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) or other group process techniques to help a group of interested parents, teachers, specialists, and administrators quickly set priorities. These techniques may not be as "scientific" as a carefully designed questionnaire, but they do generate excitement, interest, and give everyone an equal voice in setting priorities. Just as important, they keep a project moving forward, with priorities and directions immediately available. Directions for using the the Nominal Group Technique are in Appendix G.

3. Begin collecting articles, pamphlets, brochures, books, magazines, and other information items that are related to what parents say they are interested in. This does not always correspond to actual needs, that is, the gap between "what is," and "what ought to be" or "what is preferred." If there is a difference, include some items related to the latter, but in the beginning concentrate on responding to interests and priorities.

   Unless you have a better budget than most schools, seek out free or low-cost items. There are a multitude of these, but locating them is something like a non-stop scavenger hunt. Popular magazines, professional journals, and government publications are not only good sources in and of themselves, but they often have listings of available publications or advertisements that include items to send for. Local, county, and state agencies are other sources. The Extension Service of the Department of Agriculture almost always has a variety of timely, factual, and reliable material related to family life and child rearing. Sometimes this material is specific to regional or local concerns--a real plus. Non-profit foundations and organizations develop and distribute information on an amazing variety of subjects. Some supermarkets distribute excellent pamphlets related to health and nutrition. Medical and dental groups are also good sources. We have listed a number of resources at the end of this section, but don't stop there. Funding and interest comes and goes, and new material comes out almost daily. Seek out local sources, scour the magazines, and write for samples of anything free. Prepare a form letter that explains what you are doing and that you need a listing, sample of materials, and any other information they can send.

   Don't forget your own state, county, and local school system. There are recommendations that schools should do more to involve parents in children's learning activities at home. Most schools have a wealth of material on that subject. If specific needs for home learning are identified by the teachers in a local school, the parent information center may have or be able to find something to help. If not, get a curriculum specialist or teacher to write it!

4. Screen and evaluate all material, particularly those prepared and distributed by companies trying to promote the use of their products. Some are excellent; some are not only blatantly commercial but less than truthful. Use the same criteria you would for classroom materials. Is the information presented in line with current best thinking and practice? Is it free from sexism and racism? Is it respectful of the diversity of values and beliefs found in this country? Are the illustrations clear and representative of the diversity of values and beliefs found in this country? Are the illustrations clear and representative of all ethnic and racial groups and both sexes? Is the language level appropriate for those people who will be reading it? Is the presentation clear, interesting, and likely to be read by the parents? Short, to the point pamphlets and booklets certainly don't have the depth of books, but the books may not be read.

   If you have to buy the material, is it worth what it costs or could similar information be obtained somewhere else for less?

   Discard (or save for an example of what not to use) all unsuitable material.

   Get multiple copies of everything you can, so that parents can take them home to read and refer to. Who can resist "freebies?"

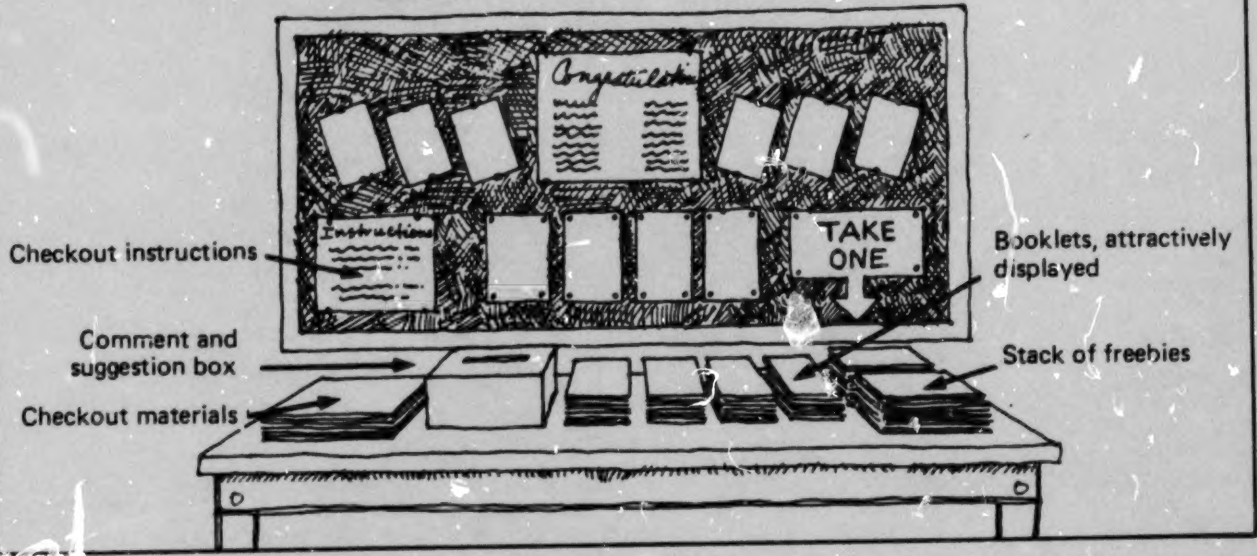
5. Develop a display and check-out system. Neither needs to be elaborate. If space is at a premium, a slim, revolving rack will fit in a corner; bookshelves of tiered racks will fit against a wall. Try to have enough space so that materials can be grouped according to topic, and so that each item can be easily seen. If at all possible, place the resource center in a high traffic area. One school established a fairly elaborate parent library in the school's Instructional Resource Center, only to find that parents seldom came in. Indeed, most of them didn't even know it was there!

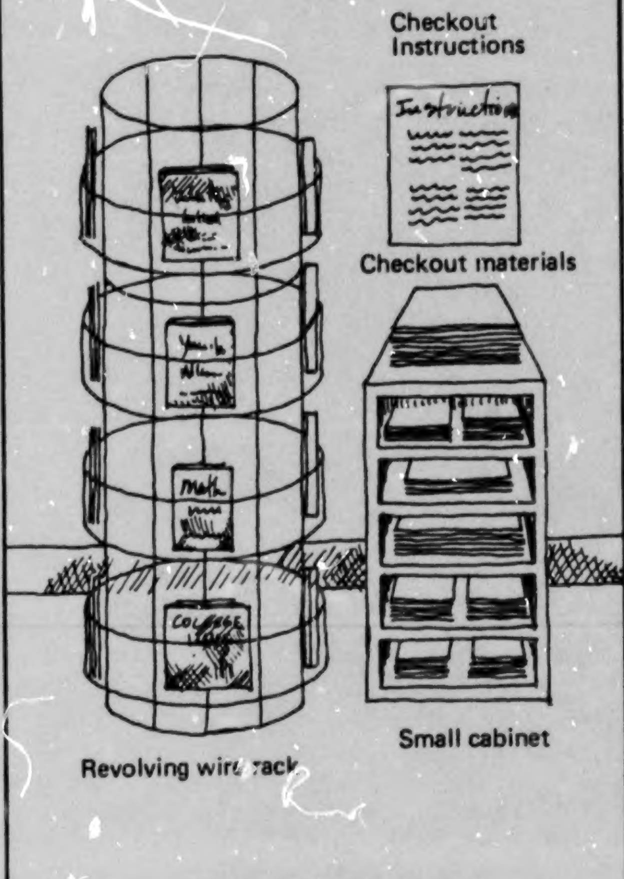
   The check out-check in system should be simple and easily managed by parents unless a person will be there at all times. Post instructions right next to the check-out materials. Make clear what is to be taken and kept, and what is to be checked out. The life of paperback booklets can be extended by covering them with clear contact paper or book covers. Articles from magazines can be clipped and placed in term paper folders.

   If something costs a small amount, you can post a sign that says:

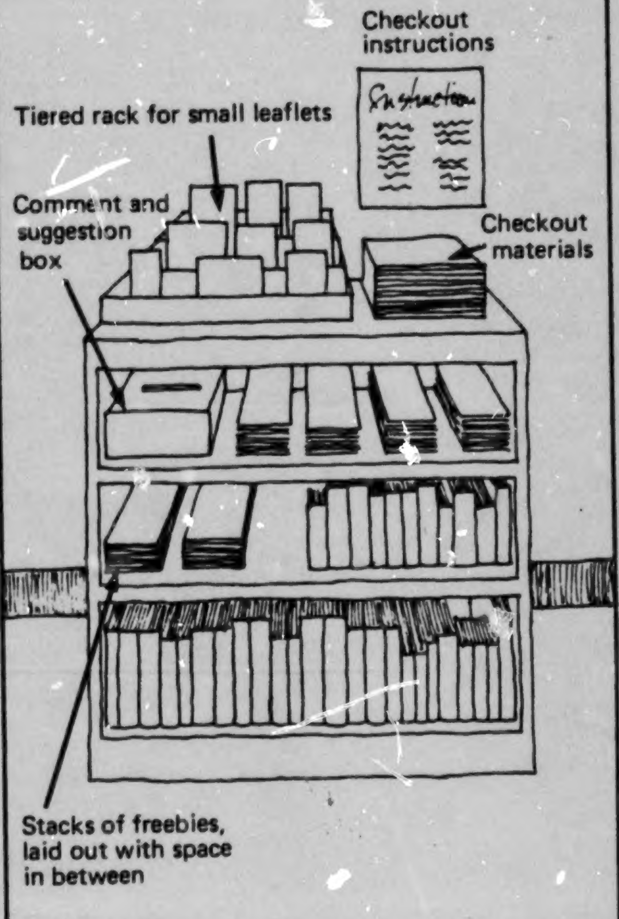
   > Read here or buy for a quarter. Drop money in suggestion box.

BULLETIN BOARD WITH TABLE BELOW


Congratulations
Instructions
TAKE ONE
Checkout instructions
Booklets, attractively displayed
Comment and suggestion box
Stack of freebies
Checkout materials


Checkout Instructions
Instructions
Checkout materials
Math
College
Revolving wire rack
Small cabinet

REVOLVING WIRE RACK


Checkout instructions
Instructions
Tiered rack for small leaflets
Comment and suggestion box
Checkout materials
Stacks of freebies, laid out with space in between

BOOKSHELF

Expect to lose a few materials. This is one reason we suggest low cost or free material.

6. Develop an evaluation system. Consider any or all of the following ways to monitor use of and interest in the parent information center.

    a. Number of books and booklets checked out.

    b. Number of free materials taken.

    c. On which topics were materials taken or checked out most frequently.

    d. Number of parents who came by.

    e. Number of questions, suggestions, or ideas coming from parents that seem related to the information.

    f. Half sheets of paper, a pen, and a covered box labeled "Comments and Suggestions" placed near the check-out station.

    g. Systematic followup through telephone interviews or short evaluation sheets. Determine amount of use. What types of material were most helpful? Least helpful? In what ways was the information put into practice?

7. Advertise that the information/resource center is available to all. Use newsletters, notices sent home, signs prominently posted by the most used entrance, have hot drinks and browsing time at PTA/PTO meetings and parent-teacher conference times; send home a sample of free material suitable for parents of each age level in the school, with the announcement that more information is available at school. Consider conducting a "kick-off" workshop with hands-on "make and take" items related to the resources.

8. Monitor and rotate materials. Don't put everything out at once. Add and take away materials to keep people coming back. You'll have new materials coming in anyway, from current sources. Let current and past use guide you. If no one takes the pamphlets on "Tasty Treats from Tofu," and the leaflets on stress and anger disappear in a week, you have some good information on parents' interests.

    Carefully time the display of seasonal material. Leaflets on selecting toys and gifts and toy safety should be placed in the resource center just before the big advertising push for holiday giving. Items related to summer learning and fun at home should be displayed shortly before summer vacation.

    Keep the center neat, attractive, and well-cared for. Ask for parents' suggestions and follow through on them. If a parent organization is running the center, make sure someone is responsible for regular straightening up, replenishing, and reordering.

9. What about people who live at the end of the bus route and seldom get to the school, or who go to work early and stay late? One group suggested that another parent might send home material these people request. Another good use for the tote bag or back pack! In rural areas, check to see if the bookmobile would distribute some of the materials.

10. Evaluate and modify accordingly!

Possible sources for free or low cost materials. Addresses given are the most current we could locate. Many agencies of the Federal Government are concerned with families, children, and learning. They have a wealth of materials that have been developed in the last decade. Explore these resources fully. Often the material can be reproduced freely, even if the agency is unable to provide multiple copies.

There are many sources other than the ones listed here. See also the list of CEDaR members in Appendix H.

Possible Sources for Free and Inexpensive Materials for Parent Information Center

Action for Children's Television
46 Austin Street
Newtonville, MA 02160

Administration for Children, Youth,
and Families
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, DC 20013

Adult Education Association of the USA
810 Eighteenth Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20006

American Academy of Pediatrics
Box P., P.O. Box 1034
Evanston, IL 60204

American Association for Maternal and
Child Health
P.O. Box 965
Los Altos, CA 94022

American Foundation for the Blind
15 West Sixteenth Street
New York, NY 10011

American Home Economics Association
2010 Massachusettes Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20036

American Humane Association
5631 South Roslyn Street
Englewood, CO 80110

American Library Association
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611

Alexander Graham Bell Association for
Deaf
3417 Volta Place
Washington, DC 20007

Association for Childhood Education
International
11141 Georgia Avenue
Suite 200
Wheaton, MD 20902

Bureau of Education for the Handicapped
US Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

Child Study Association
853 Broadway
New York, NY 10003

Child Welfare League of America
67 Irving Place
New York, NY 10003

Consumer Information Center
Pueblo, CO 81009

Council for Basic Education
725 Fifteenth Street NW
Washington, DC 20005

Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091

Council on Interracial Books for
Children
1841 Broadway
New York, NY 10023

Daycare and Child Development Council
of America, Inc.
520 Southern Building
805 Fifteenth Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20005

Educational Resources Information
Center (ERIC)
Clearinghouse on Elementary and
Early Childhood Education
College of Education, University of
Illinois
Urbana, IL 61801

Family Learning
19 Davis Drive
Belmont, CA 94002

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Family Service Association of America
44 East Twenty-third Street
New York, NY 10010

Home and School Institute
Trinity College
Washington, DC 20017

The Horn Book
Dept. ACX
31 St. James Avenue
Boston, MA 02116

International Reading Association
6 Tyre Avenue
Newark, DE 19711

Johnson and Johnson
175 Community Drive
Great Neck, NY 11002

National Association for the Education of Young Children
1834 Connecticut Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20009

National Association for Mental Health
1800 North Kent Street
Arlington, VA 22209

National Association for Retarded Children
1522 1 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20005

National Black Child Development Institute
1463 Rhode Island Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20005

National Center for Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect
Office of Human Development Services
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, DC 20013

National Congress of Parents and Teachers
700 North Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611

National Council for Children and Television
20 Nassau Street
Suite 200
Princeton, NJ 08542

National Council on Family Relations
1219 University Avenue S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55414

National Education Association
The Academic Building
Saw Mill Road
West Haven, CT 06516

National Institute of Education
1200 19th Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20036

National Institute of Mental Health
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Office of Consumer Affairs
Food/Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Parents Without Partners, Inc.
7910 Woodmont Avenue
Washington, DC 20014

Public Affairs Committee, Inc.
381 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), Inc.
Smithsonian Institution
Suite 500
600 Maryland Avenue S.W.
Washington, DC 20560

Smithsonian Family Learning Project
Smithsonian Institution, Suite
Suite 500
600 Maryland Avenue S.W.
Washington, DC 20560

Superintendent of Documents
US Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20402

USA Toy Library Association
5940 W Tauhy
Chicago, IL 60648

US Consumer Product Safety Commission
Washington, DC 20207

Call toll-free: 800/638-2772
or check for regional offices

US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20003

US Department of Education
Federal Office Building
400 Maryland Avenue S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

STATE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AGENCIES

Dr. Ann Thompson, Director
Cooperative Extension Service
Auburn University
Auburn, AL 36830

Dr. C. E. Barnhart, Director
Cooperative Extension
University of Kentucky
Agricultural Science Building, N.
Lexington, KY 40506

Dr. R. M. Kottman, Director
Ohio Agricultural, Research and Development Center
Ohio State University
2120 Fyffe Road
Columbus, OH 43210

Dr. Samuel Smith, Director
Cooperative Extension
Agricultural Administration Building
Penn State University
University Park, PA 16802

Dr. M. L. Downnen, Director
Agricultural Extension Service
University of Tennessee
Box 1071
Knoxville, TN 37901

Dr. Mitchell Geasler, Director
Cooperative Extension
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Dr. Rachael Tompkins, Director
Cooperative Extension
West Virginia University
817 Knapp Hall
P.O. Box 6031
Morgantown, WV 26506-6031

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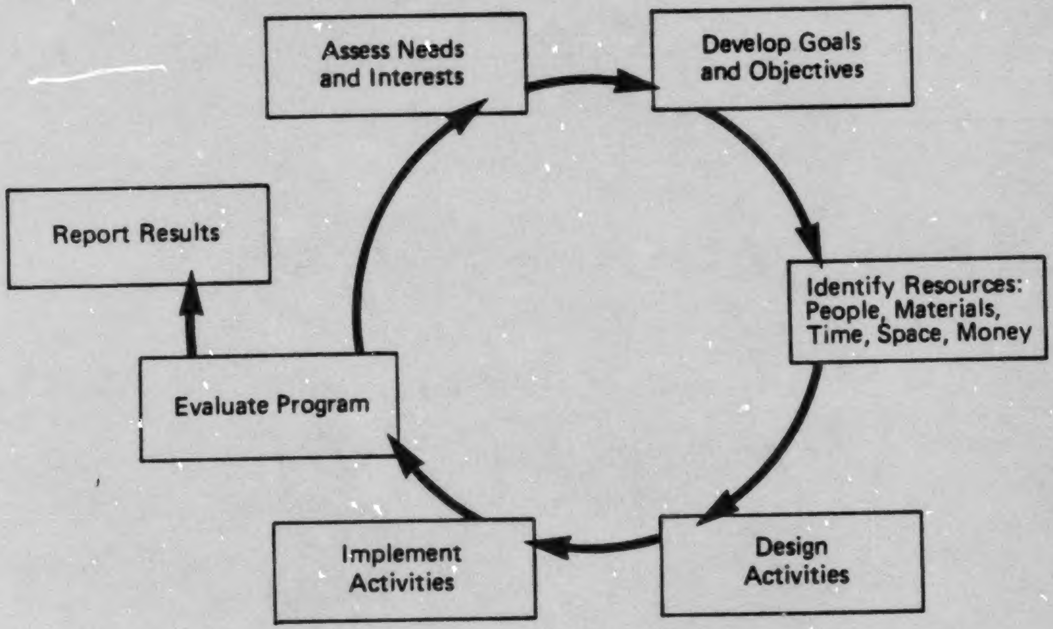
Snow, M. (1984) School-family relations program: Quarterly report to the National Institute of Education. Charleston, West Virginia: Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.

Section IX

Evaluation: Formative, Summative, and Points In Between

When we read a mystery or suspense novel, we look forward to the last chapter to find out "whodunnit."

Last chapters in professional books often summarize the writer's conclusions and recommendations, pulling together the ideas that have been presented throughout the book. Likewise, you can be sure that the last chapter or section in books on staff development, educational improvement, implementation of new programs, or almost any educational activity will be on evaluation. And so it is with this Resource Notebook. Yet, evaluation should be only one phase of the planning process. It is "not a conclusion but a new beginning" (Mertz, 1983, p. 59), as shown in the diagram below.


Assess Needs and Interests
Develop Goals and Objectives
Identify Resources: People, Materials, Time, Space, Money
Design Activities
Implement Activities
Evaluate Program
Report Results

"Rather than being a destination, evaluation is a map, or progress report that answers two questions: "Where are we? Where do we go from here?" (Mertz, 1983, p. 59).

What is to be evaluated and how? We are recommending that local schools and school districts implement a staff development program to help the school and individual teachers in the school improve school-family relations and communications. The desired end result is, of course, a "better" education for children.

To help achieve that result, we have suggested a number of related goals: better staff development in school-family relations and communications; an increase in the quantity, variety, and quality of school-home communications; and use of a systematic planning process for staff development, as well as specific examples of things administrators, teachers and specialists, and service and support pesonnel can do for and with parents. Some decision has to be made about which aspects of this multi-faceted approach will be evaluated and how that will be done. Ideally, of course, all aspects should be evaluated. The chart on the following page illustrates the complexity of the task.

Evaluation Concerns*

Evaluation of staff development typically has five basic concerns: the content, the presenter, the participants' behaviors, short- and long-term, and the impact on student learning. The chart below addresses these concerns on six levels, ranging from *purpose* through *type of instrument*.

Evaluation Concern	Purpose	Administered To Whom	When Administered	Results Sought	Where Administered	Type of Instrument
Content of inservice activity	Ascertain if content presented met desired objectives	Participants by planners	Conclusion of inservice activity	Participant assessment of content effectiveness	On site of activity	Likert type checklist
Presenter of inservice activity	Ascertain the effect of the presenter on the attainment of objectives	Participants by planners	Conclusion of inservice activity	Participant assessment of presenter	On site of activity	Checklist
Participant Learning: Immediate	Determine whether participants achieved objectives	Participants by presenter	Conclusion of inservice activity	Participant behavior change	On site of activity	Varied based on objectives
Participant Learning: Long-Term	Determine whether behavior change remains after period of time	Participants by self, peers or students	Minimum of two months after activity	Participant behavior change	In participant classroom	Varied based on objectives
Student Learning	Determine whether students of participants change behavior as result of teacher	Participants by self, peers or students	Before and after teacher behavior change introduced into classroom	Student behavior change	In participant classroom observation	1. Classroom environment observation 2. Checklist 3. Objective referenced

*From: Staff Development Leadership: A Resource Book, 1983. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio Department of Education.

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Realistically, we must also ask who is to evaluate and when? Most teachers, administrators, and staff development people already have full schedules. Some have little or no background in research and evaluation, and usually only large districts have an institutional research section.

Descriptions of the ideal evaluation are sometimes so far from what local schools can do that schools may simply do nothing--a mistake, even if an understandable one. So, in this evaluation section we are going to do what we have done in the other sections: List and discuss the general principles that should guide evaluation of projects and processes of this nature; give a variety of examples and resources at several levels of precision and difficulty; and refer you to appropriate sources for further information. In this way, local schools and school districts can construct and conduct evaluation that will be useful to them, answer the questions they need to ask, and will ultimately help them improve communications with the families they serve.

Informal judgments and evaluations about inservice training, communicating with parents, and the influence of school-family relations are made all the time. School personnel evaluate when they say "I wish we could have more inservices like this one," or "If I have to sit through one more of these...!" Teachers evaluate when they wish, "If only there were some way to reach these parents, some way to get them to show an interest in what we're doing." Principals evaluate when they say, "I don't understand this absentee rate; don't the parents know the youngsters can't learn unless they are here?" or "Everyone seemed to enjoy last year's open house. Shall we just do it the same way?"

Gathering information to do systematic evaluation of staff development and school-family communications may make these evaluations more accurate.

Even more important, such systematic evaluation can guide the development of more acceptable, effective, and efficient programs. Evaluation done for this purpose--formative evaluation--gives everyone concerned a chance to assess what's going on and make revisions or "mid-course corrections" to improve what is being done.

Summative evaluation is usually done at the conclusion of a given program or course of action. Its purposes are to provide evidence of overall program effectiveness and to provide information to guide decisions about future programs.

In formative evaluation, summative evaluation, and points in between, remember that the purpose of evaluation is not to decide "Did we fail?" or "Did we succeed?" Instead, it is to document "We did this, with these results," and to suggest future directions.

With this brief introduction, let's look at some of the principles that should guide evaluation.

- Decide what you want to find out.
- Involve participants in planning the evaluation.
- Whenever possible collect baseline information so that progress can be determined.
- Relate evaluation directly to the objectives of the training session, program, or whatever is being evaluated.
- Use a variety of measures.
- Use both immediate and follow-up measures.
- Use data-gathering techniques that are not burdensome.
- Share results with those who have a need and a right to know.

Decide what you want to find out. Most inservice education is related to teachers' instructional practices in the classroom. Staff development in school-home communication adds another dimension to an already complex evaluation problem. Let's look at examples of some possible questions. Each school will have its own.

1. Was the workshop or inservice training session itself well organized, interesting, and relevant? Were time, space, and learning materials adequate and appropriate? Were the leaders knowledgeable and skilled?

2. Was the information appropriate and useful to participants in their respective positions (professional affiliation and role, grade level teaching, or associated with experience level, professional training, school setting)?

   Examples of instruments to determine participants' reactions are in Appendix I. Determining the answers to questions 3 and 4 is more difficult.

3. Did participants achieve the stated objectives?

4. Did participants put the information and skills into practice?

In school-family communication, some possible questions might be:

1. Was there a difference in quantity, type, or quality of school-family communications? If so, what was it?

2. What types of school-home communications were most effective and well-received at which age/grade level of schooling? For rural populations? For small town populations? Urban populations? Educational level of the parents?

3. What were parents', children's, and teachers' reactions to a given change in communication patterns?

4. Were there any unanticipated results? If so, what were they?

In evaluating the planning process, some questions might be:

1. What were the benefits of the planning process?

2. What were the drawbacks?

3. In what ways did the open, systematic planning process affect the program's acceptability? Effectiveness? Efficiency?

Involve participants in planning the evaluation. The same planning committee that guided needs assessment, goal setting, and the other steps of the inservice planning process can advise on evaluation, too. They may not know all the technical aspects, but they'll have their own insights and suggestions. Perhaps most important, they can represent teachers, principals, and other personnel regarding what types of data-gathering instruments and procedures will be acceptable and feasible. An elaborate evaluation design that depends on a time-consuming log that each teacher must work on each day is doomed to failure. The teachers on the committee or in any advisory capacity will "tell it like it is"--and save everyone a lot of time and effort.

Whenever possible, collect baseline information so that progress can be determined. The familiar "pre" and "post" treatment has much to recommend. It is really the only way to know if progress toward the desired goals, whatever they are, is being made.

Usually, when we think of "pre" and "post," we think "Oh no, a test! Two tests!" But remember, there are many ways to get information. Testing is only one. For example, some home-school communications are specifically designed to decrease absenteeism. Pre- and post-treatment results are available from attendance records; parent perceptions are available through telephone interviews.

Relate evaluation directly to the objectives of the training session, program, or whatever is being evaluated. In the staff development examples in this book, we have stated clear, measurable objectives. Participants' attainment or progress toward attainment of those objectives can be determined by the end of the session. However, the transfer of those skills back to the school and to participants' communications with parents is far more difficult to determine. On-the-job performance is what really matters.

However, when we get beyond the measurable skills of the training sessions to a school's actual goals and objectives in school-family communications, the goals are seldom as clear. Do we simply want to increase the number of communications? Change their nature? Influence the quality?

Focus them on one aspect of school-family relations, such as teaching parents to conduct school-related learning activities at home? Or all these things? Schools will have to define their goals for school-home communication before school-level evaluation can be done. In fact, they need to decide on those goals before local inservice trainers can select or develop appropriate objectives and activities for school personnel.

Evaluation of what actually transpires in interactions between parents and school personnel is far more difficult than evaluating a teacher's ability to give clear directions or use time efficiently.

Use a variety of measures. Different data-gathering techniques can yield different kinds of information. While direct, written or oral measures of various kinds are most often used, indirect or unobtrusive measures are also appropriate.

Some of the staff development strategies and home-school communications in this Resource Notebook lend themselves to unobtrusive measures. For example, it is quite easy to keep track of the number of items on different topics taken or checked out from a family information or resource center. Such an unobtrusive measure gives reliable and quantifiable data for decision-making.

An observer can rate the degree of participation and involvement of inservice participants in relation to the different methods used. For example, we suggest an interdependent group technique called "Jigsaw" as a way to help inservice participants get a shared base of information. An observer can tell if the groups are on task or if they use that time to talk about other concerns.

Look beyond the traditional workshop evaluation for variations and other ways of finding out what went well and what needs improving. Some possibilities include:

- Formal pre- and post-test performance or written measures
- Product evaluation
- Group discussions and interviews
- Individual interviews in person or by telephone
- Observation
- Written evaluation form with ratings, rankings, checklists, agree/disagree, or other predetermined responses
- Written evaluation using open questions
- Task simulations
- Unobtrusive measures, such as how many did/didn't participate, level of involvement
- Self-evaluation (logs, diaries, checklists, reflective evaluation)
- Actuarial data, such as pre- and post-absentee data, homework signed and sent back, permission slips, and other information promptly returned

Use both immediate and follow-up measures. Immediate reactions to staff development sessions may be glowing, but considerably faded a month or two later. Or the reverse may be true.

Putting into practice some of the school-home communication approaches suggested in this Resource Notebook may seem like a formidable task when first presented, but well worth it after the procedures are in place and working in a school.

Knowing that they are really expected to try out what they have learned and that followup will be done to see how the suggested procedures worked may give people incentive to put them into practice. One of the elements in successful inservice is followup (Joyce & Showers, 1980), and although all followup is not done in the form of evaluation, some evaluation should be beyond the immediate.

Use data-gathering techniques that are not burdensome. There is no need to collect information that will not be used. Whoever designs instruments and procedures should make sure that they are as efficient as possible, but that they get the needed information. Poorly designed "feedback forms" given at the end of an inservice may not give enough information. Overlong ones may not be filled out! Get an expert to help, if at all possible. In Appendices C and I are examples of short, but informative, instruments.

Share results with those who have a need and a right to know. Report results and the modifications, continuation, or discontinuation of certain aspects of a program to those who should know. Few people want a technical report, but they do like to know the outcome of a project in which they have participated. Parents are sure to be interested, too. In fact, if they know in advance that teachers are trying to improve school-family communications, they will help make the project "succeed."

If your district wants an in-depth research-oriented evaluation, but does not have the institutional research staff to design and conduct one, consider using a pre-developed plan that can be adapted to local needs and interests. The paper that follows presents an evaluation research framework for looking at school-family communications.

Evaluation of School-Home Communication Strategies

Edward E. Gotts and Richard F. Purnell

The implementation of communication between school personnel and parents has been shown to increase rates of attendance (Duncan, 1969; Parker & McCoy, 1977; Sheats & Dunkelberger, 1979; Shelton & Dobson, 1973), to improve the school performance of children (Kittle, 1975; Duncan, 1969; Shelton & Dobson, 1973), and to increase parent-initiated contacts with schools (Bittle, 1975); Duncan, 1969; Mager, 1980; Parker & McCoy, 1977). An extensive search of the school-home relations literature reveals, however, that present knowledge is based principally on non-systematic studies at the preschool and primary levels, while few studies have been conducted at the secondary level (Gotts & Purnell, in press).

Among researchers, school personnel, and parents, there appears to be widespread consensus that improved school-family relations are beneficial and that increased parent involvement in schools is a worthwhile goal. Nevertheless, in reports of programs with this general goal, specific objectives are seldom stated. Consequently evaluation results are sometimes vague and unclear (Anselmo, 1977; Filipczak, Lordeman & Friedman, 1977; Nedler & McAfee, 1979). Filipczak and others (1977) conclude that communication between home and school requires an increased emphasis on measureable outcomes to assess program effectiveness.

There remains much to be learned about this art of communicating effectively on the part of both school personnel and parents in order to have school-family relations become more meaningful and effective. This seems clear from the mistrust, misperception, and miscommunication that so often mar their efforts to relate to one another (Lightfoot, 1978). Such negative results need not be the norm. For example, our own research suggests that communication and mutual positive feelings increase when schools pay particular attention to the artful practice of communication in such areas as attendance, academic deficiencies, progress toward graduation, student misconduct, the school's expectations and standards, and providing current news on curricular and extracurricular events (Gotts & Purneil, in press).

This brief review of literature plus our own experience support three conclusions:

(1) Little is known about what works well at the secondary level, and, while more is known at the primary level, the knowledge is based on non-systematic studies.

(2) There is a broad consensus that improved communications should be a goal of schools, but too little emphasis has been placed on establishing specific objectives and assessing measurable outcomes.

(3) In our research it has seemed most productive to define objectives in terms of specific promising techniques of communication that are being applied to typical day-to-day issues in the operation of schools--such as:

  (a) reporting academic deficiences and

  (b) providing current news of the school's curricular and extra-curricular events, and so forth.

In short, this is a "poorly researched" area partly because the task of research has not been well-defined and conceptualized heretofore. Much that needs to be accomplished can be done within an evaluation research framework. For this reason, the balance of this presentation will focus on defining and conceptualizing the task from an evaluation perspective. We will present data in support of our conceptual approach and refer to some of our work-in-progress to illustrate how the approach is carried out.

A Conceptual Approach

The following conceptual approach was developed to meet our study requirements during AEL's three years of action research into this topical area. We have come to believe that researchers should link any proposed evaluation activities to six aspects of the school-home communications mix:

(1) The level at which interactions occur (e.g., primary vs. secondary);

(2) the locus of communication (i.e., classroom, department, school, central office);

(3) whether the school's message is directed to an individual family (type I) or to a group or schoolwide audience (type G);

(4) whether communication flows from school to home (school-home or S-H) or home to school (home-school or H-S);

(5) the focal or topical areas around which interactions may interactions may occur; and

(6) the methods or vehicles of communication employed.

Levels of Interaction

The styles of parent-child and teacher-child interaction change dramatically from the preschool through the elementary and into the secondary school years. Yet, as we have reviewed the literature thoroughly, it appears that parent involvement specialists and researchers have tried to apply a single model of school-home relations, irrespective of the child's age. Moreover, the uniform model applied is one that has developed out of early childhood education. Extrapolating from the preschool to the primary level seems to have worked reasonably well, e.g., regarding having parents visit school or join parent-teacher organizations. When these expectations have not worked out at the secondary level, educators have erroneously concluded that parents of teens have "lost interest"--yet, it is the inappropriate application of an early childhood model of home-school relations that is at fault. From this we conclude that quite different outcome indicators are needed to evaluate parent involvement across the years and levels of schooling.

Locus of Communication

It is necessary first to conceptualize whether the locus of communication is the classroom, school building, or other level. Locus of communication can normally be determined by a functional analysis of where opportunity and responsibility reside for the particular matter at issue. An academic deficiency, for example, can be communicated naturally at the classroom level; relating a serious breech of conduct may fall to the principal or a designate. Attending to locus of communication leads the evaluator to consider where within the system to look for and track interactions regarding particular issues. If communication fails to occur where expected, that may point up problems at the level being examined or at some higher level in the system--e.g., teachers may not initiate communications about particular matters because they believe it is the responsibility of personnel at a supervisory level. Either internal miscommunication or insufficient understanding/skills or the absence of policy and clear guidelines for practice may be the culprits.

Type I and G Communications

When schools communicate with parents, individuals (I) or groups (G) may be the intended audience. For example, all parents need to be familiar with attendance policy (type G); the parents of an absentee child need to be informed (type I). Both types I and G communications are needed if parents are to take expected actions. Evaluation may, thus, assess the sufficiency and quality of both G and I types and examine their relationships with various outcomes. Sometimes it is not enough to inform parents: they may require instruction, guidance, or direct help. We found in our research, for instance, that early notices of academic deficiency were appreciated by parents, but few parents knew how to go about analyzing and helping with such problems (Gotts and Purnell, in press). In response to this discovery, we have prepared "guidance sheets" to help parents analyze and respond more effectively to potential sources of academic failure, and we are currently assessing the effects of these in a number of sites. From this it can be seen that evaluation of school-home communications must be conducted within a system's perspective by considering the interrelatedness of all elements in the system.

S-H and H-S Communications

School to home (S-H) and home to school (H-S) communications are both part of an effective program. Schools tend to be active as S-H communicators but are much less successful in encouraging H-S messages. Even when the latter occur, they are likely to happen in incidental, spontaneous, informal, and unplanned ways. As a result, the H-S messages seldom leave any data-based residual to influence schools systematically. To counteract the lack of H-S communications, we designed an interview procedure for sampling parents' views and feeding them directly back to principals and superintendents. In the process we learned that these administrators (a) recognized the implications of the findings, (b) immediately indicated possible changes they might try, and (c) subsequently developed and carried out improved practices (Gotts and Purnell, in press). We are currently experimenting in several sites with the use of local volunteers to conduct interviews of this type. If this strategy works out, then we will prepare a step-by-step operational manual to guide interested administrators, researchers, and others through the required activities. In this way the H-S side of the desired two-way process can be formalized. Our recommendation to evaluators is that any school-home relations program should be advised to include plans for generating H-S messages.

Focal Areas

It is difficult to develop operational measures for such broad constructs as involvement, relations, and communications. When evaluators try to work from these global notions, they often look at self-reported attitudes, measures of attendance or compliance ratings of satisfaction or success, and similar indicators. We recommend instead that efforts to improve communications should focus on specific areas such as academic progress, attendance, student conduct, progress toward graduation, extracurricular activities, opportunities for parents to serve as volunteers, and so forth. Once these focal areas are linked to communication objectives, evaluation can seek to define success in terms of: (a) whether parents learned about these specific areas, (b) if the information was timely and sufficient, (c) how they responded, (d) with what results, (e) what further they desire to know, and (f) which methods of communicating are both acceptable to parents and effective in producing desired actions and results.

Vehicles of Communication

Improving relations and involvement is often thought of in terms of global programs or treatments. When such programs are studied, however, it is unclear which independent variable components produce particular effects and which are ineffective. Alternatively, we recommend that research and evaluation examine instead the effects of parent-teacher handbooks, newsletters, academic deficiency reports, academic guidance sheets, parent-teacher conferences, open house, parent interviews, and so on. When these individual vehicles are used as treatments, it becomes possible to examine (a) their individual contributions, (b) the focal areas which they best convey, (c) optimum strategies for using them, and so on.

Evaluation of Strategies

In the preceding discussion we have considered a conceptual approach to evaluating school-home communications. It requires that empirical attention be directed toward six differentiated aspects of the communication mix. When we refer to strategies of communication, we mean those practices which occur at particular intersections of the six aspects. An example will illustrate the concept of strategy: Think of a communication at the high school level (aspect 1) involving teachers (2) and individual families (3) and being sent by the former to the latter (4)--i.e., from school to home--dealing with academic performance (5) and transmitted via a special notice (6). An instance of the foregoing strategy would be an academic deficiency report used at the high school level.

This brings us back to an earlier point: Much that needs to be accomplished can be done within an evaluation research framework. We are advocating that local school systems carefully select for study some limited set of strategies that promise to meet their identified local communication needs. Evaluation will then be undertaken in the manner previously suggested above during discussion of the six aspects. Knowledge gained in this manner can impact directly on the operation of the local system; also it can simultaneously contribute to the overall accumulation of understanding of the art of improving relations and school effectiveness.

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Section X

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Selected References on Parent Involvement

Selected References on Parent Involvement

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Appendix C

Questions for Telephone Interview of Parents

Questions for Telephone Interview of Parents

General Questions for Home-School Communications:

A) How often do you receive communications from the school? (Examples)--Please describe them briefly.

B) How often do you have contact with any of your child's teachers or other school personnel?--Could you give some examples?

C) I'm sure that you're aware that in ___________________ School students have various kinds of difficulties and problems. How serious do you think a problem should be before a school notifies or informs a parent? For these kinds of things that you think parents should be informed about, in what ways do you think the school and home should work together to try to correct the problems?

D) In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the amount of information that you receive from school?

(If dissatisfied): Could you please explain what the school might do for you to be more satisfied?

Appendix D

Summary of In-depth Needs Assessment Process

BUILDING LOCAL CONSENSUS

A session prepared for the East Coast Title I Seminar:

Dissemination and Program Improvement

The Warwick Hotel
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Joe E. Shively

Educational Services Office
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Charleston, West Virginia

January 12, 1982

This material was prepared for use in this mini-session, "Building Local Consensus," at the East Coast Title I Dissemination and Program Improvement Seminar. The material, prepared by Carolyn Davis Luzader, has been summarized and condensed, as has this "training session." To actually conduct a Needs Assessment conference (using the DAP process), approximately 1½ - 2 days of intensive training is required. Only highlights of the eight major activities that make up a conference are included here; the complete conference manual is approximately 30 pages. This summarized material and condensed training session are not intended to take the place of the formal training and full versions of the materials required to conduct a Needs Assessment conference. For further information on the AEL Needs Assessment process, please contact:

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The project presented or reported herein was performed pursuant to one or more contracts and/or grants from the National Institute of Education, Department of Education. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory or the National Institute of Education, and no official endorsement by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory or the National Institute of Education should be inferred.

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DAP: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE APPALACHIA EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY'S NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROJECT *

From Aristotle to Dewey to Churchman, problem solving has been the essential element in individual growth and effective group functioning. Despite the volumes of rhetoric devoted to the topic, however, groups continue to countenance difficulties in their attempts to define and solve the problems facing them. Consistently, problems tend to be defined more in terms of prescriptions for action than as discrepancies between actual and desired states of affairs. Commonly, groups spend more time dealing with difficulties encountered in how they function than with the topics that brought them together, frequently without recognizing that those are separate issues.

DAP is the acronym for a set of concepts and procedures that the members of any group can employ to refine their problem solving skills and bring them to bear on real-life, day-to-day group needs. Based upon a particular view of human beings, communication, and the process of inquiry, DAP involves the members of a group in generating and using three kinds of information: *designative* information (D) about the "what is" state of some one or some thing; comparable *appraisive* information (A) about "what is preferred;" and *prescriptive* information (P) that suggests what to do when discrepancies can be identified between "what is" and "what is preferred."

As group members generate and use these three kinds of information, they move systematically through three different phases of the problem solving process. They begin by identifying their individual and common problems clearly and specifically. They then develop plans or prescriptions for dealing with the most critical of those common problems. And they complete the cycle of problem solving by implementing their plans, monitoring effects, and evaluating their success as joint problem solving systems.

Two relatively simple, but terribly powerful conceptualizations undergird the DAP approach to identifying and resolving problems or needs within groups. One of these provides us with a way of thinking clearly about needs, needs assessment, and need fulfillment. The other provides us with a way of thinking about communication within and across groups.

How we think about needs or problems takes its cues from C. S. Morris, a communication theorist who has helped us distinguish clearly among designative inquiry, appraisive inquiry, and prescriptive inquiry–the source of DAP. To be more specific:

- When any of us tries to identify "what was, is, or will be" with respect to ourselves, others, or the world out there, we're engaged in *designative inquiry* and the product of our efforts is *designative information*. "Yesterday was Sunday." "It's now after 2:00 p.m." "Tomorrow I will be in Chicago." "Fall is certainly beautiful in the Appalachians." "It is 80° in this room." All of these statements provide designative information, for they attempt to describe what was, what is, or what will be.

- By contrast, when we identify our preferences or desires for the past, present, or future, we're engaged in a very different kind of inquiry, for our words become value-laden, and they describe, not "what is," but, rather, "what is preferred." We call this second kind of effort *appraisive inquiry* and the information it produces *appraisive information*. For instance, "I have always preferred ice cream to pie." "My desire is to be an educator." "I wish that it was 70° in this room." These are appraisive statements.

- Now, needs or problems arise when there is a clear discrepancy or mismatch between "what is" and "what is preferred," between the designative and appraisive information we have about some common referent. "Johnny reads two levels below grade level; we prefer him to read at least at grade level." "It is 80 degrees in this room; I prefer it to be 70 degrees." These are statements of need.

- To complete the cycle, there is yet a third kind of inquiry and resulting information that we call *prescriptive inquiry* and *prescriptive information*. As the words suggest, prescriptive inquiry attempts to identify specific actions, plans, strategies, tactics, and so forth that, if implemented, will reduce known discrepancies between "what is" and "what is preferred." Sometimes, prescriptions are designed to change "what is"–the designative state. "Turn on the air conditioner to reduce the temperature from 80° to 70°." Other times, they are designed to change "what is preferred"–the appraisive state. Either way, however, they take their cues from clearly identified needs that have been defined in terms of "what is" and "what is preferred."

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*Adapted from

Nagle, John M. Two conceptualizations that undergird the 1980 Needs Assessment Project of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory. Paper presentation at the annual AEL Conference on Improving Education through Research and Development. Charleston, West Virginia, October 1980.

Nagle, John M. and James H. Balderson. Group problem solving: The DAP approach. Final Project Report. Center for Educational Policy and Management. Eugene, Oregon, March 1974.

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In AEL's Needs Assessment Project, there were two specific influences of this particular conceptualization of needs and needs assessment:

- First, in our effort to distinguish clearly throughout the project between identifying needs on the one hand and, on the other, developing plans to meet those needs. Throughout the project, we have tried assiduously not to mix these two related, but very different kinds of activities.

- And second, in our effort to state needs in terms of clear discrepancies between "what is" and "what is preferred." Whether stated by participants in State Conferences, sent to others for validation, shared with state departments, or used by AEL's Board and staff to prepare long-term R and D agendas, the educational needs that provided grist for the project were consistently framed in terms of parallel descriptions of what is and what is preferred with respect to some referent.

The second conceptualization that undergirds DAP has to do with levels of communicative contact among human beings. It influenced, rather subtly, the sequence of activities that comprised the Needs Assessment Project. Think for a moment about what happens when you communicate with others, and see if these five levels of communication contact are in evidence:

Level One: Fidelity

That is, when I give a message to someone else, can he or she replicate it faithfully. Sometimes, fidelity of contact is all I want (e.g., reserving a flight to Charleston when I know precisely the flight I want); more likely, however, fidelity is just the first step, but a very necessary one, in my efforts to communicate with others.

Level Two: Understanding

That is, does the person who can replicate my message also understand it? Does he or she know what I mean? Can he or she paraphrase the message to my satisfaction? If so, we've achieved effective communicative contact at the level of understanding.

Level Three: Acceptance or Agreement

Does the person accept or agree with my message? That is, does he or she accept as true my assertion of what is? Does he or she share my assertion of what is preferred? Does he or she agree that the need I have identified is indeed a need, or that a prescription I have developed has a high probability of meeting the need to which it is addressed.

Level Four: Importance or Relevance

While the person may be able to replicate my message, while he or she may understand it and maybe even agree with it, does the person place the same priority on it that I do? Is it as important to him or her as it is to me? Testing our priorities is the challenge of this fourth level of communicative contact.

Level Five. Commitment

Ultimately, of course, assuming that communicative contact has been effective at the prior four levels, the final test of my effort to communicate turns on whether the person is prepared to behave consistent with my message. It is at this stage that descriptions of what is and what is preferred, statements of need, and descriptions for action move from the domain of linguistics to the domain of behavior.

The goal of the AEL's Needs Assessment Project was two-fold: first, to identify educational needs as they were perceived from a variety of perspectives; and then to process those needs through a sequence of steps and with a variety of persons in order to produce a set of prescriptions of "action plans" for dealing with *those* needs that are amenable to R and D and that were perceived by most participants to be most important. Throughout this multi-step process, our implicit goal was to focus on needs that can survive the five levels of communicative contact just described--fidelity, understanding, agreement, importance, and commitment. Thus, the four major activities that comprised the project, made operational the two basic conceptualizations undergirding DAP--its three kinds of inquiry and its five levels of communicative contact.

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

An annotated list of the eight activities that comprise a needs assessment conference:

Activity 1: **An Overview of the Conference**

This activity provides an overview of the conference–its purposes and processes. Personal introductions occur, the question that drives the conference is presented, the eight activities of the conference are briefly explicated, and the agenda is presented.

Activity 2: **Generating Initial Need Statements**

A need statement is defined and illustrated, practice in identification and generation of need statements occurs, rules and procedures for generation are explicated, and finally, statements of need are generated by four small groups. This is where the grist is produced.

Activity 3: **Searching for Clarity Within Each Group**

This activity provides an opportunity to address the question of clarity and understanding within each of the four small groups. Focus is on meaning of each statement, not on the truth or value of its assertions.

Activity 4: **Confirming Clarity Across the Groups**

This activity provides an opportunity to address the question of clarity across the groups, i.e., are the statements clear to individuals who were not part of the generation process.

Activity 5: **Preparing Each Group's Product**

This short activity involves preparing on 4 x 6 cards the reviewed and refined statements. These cards will be used extensively in the next activity.

Activity 6: **Collapsing Need Statements to Remove Redundancies**

This activity produces two products: a verbatim list of statements taken from the cards and a revised set of statements–collapsed and edited to reduce redundancy or ambiguity. This involves sorting the need statements into clusters and rewriting. Two versions are prepared: one typed on slips of paper for each participant and the other prepared on transparencies.

Activity 7: **Reviewing and Approving the Revised Need Statements**

In this activity, the products from preceding activities are reviewed and then, using overhead transparencies, each revised need statement prepared for the total group is reviewed and approved. Any editing which occurs on the acetates is also recorded on the corresponding slips of paper.

Activity 8: **Assessing the Importance of the Need Statements**

In this activity participants discuss (pro or con) from their particular perspective each need statement. They then rate the importance of the needs described in each need statement using a modified Q sort technique.

The first five activities comprise the first afternoon's session. The sixth is carried out at night by the Conference Coordinators. The seventh comprises the next morning's session, and the eighth activity is the major activity during the second afternoon.

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ACTIVITY 1

PURPOSE: The purpose of this activity is to provide an overview of the conference, its purposes and processes.

PROCEDURES: Begin the conference with a welcome (by one or more appropriate persons).

Explain the purpose of the conference—to learn what the participants consider to be the most important educational needs of the local school district.

Provide a brief explanation of the 2-step process: (1) identifying the needs, and (2) assessing their importance. The processes to be used are structured, group processes, requiring public display and review of many of their deliberations. Inform participants of any validation activities that will be conducted in connection with the conference, and give them some information about how the results of the Needs Assessment will be used.

Introduce the general categories of people who are participating in the conference, and then allow each individual to make his/her own personal introduction and identify the category represented.

Give a brief overview of the eight activities that will take place during the conference.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: The participants have the "content" and the conference coordinators have the "process." Together, they can create an effective conference and a useful product.

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ACTIVITY 2

PURPOSE: The purpose of this activity is to have conference participants generate, in small groups, the initial set of need statements.

PROCEDURES: Provide some general information about the meaning of a "need statement" and the procedures that will be used to generate it. Ask that they avoid the generation of "prescriptions" as much as possible, and to focus instead on actual needs.

Define a need statement by identifying its three parts:

(1) a referent or broad topic,

(2) a description of what is with respect to that topic,

(3) a comparable description of what is preferred with respect to that same topic.

A need (or need statement) describes a discrepancy between what is and what is preferred. Give a few examples of need statements that have been written in this format.

Conduct a two-part practice session in which participants first take a list of statements and identify each one as a what is or what is preferred statement. In the second part, have them actually generate several need statements, using the three parts described above. Then have them read their statements aloud for group discussion.

Be sure everyone has in mind the question that guides the conference: What do you, as a group, consider to be the most important educational needs of your local school district?

Ask the participants to go to their assigned groups, identify a recorder and begin generating need statements (on butcher paper) with no questioning of clarity or understanding.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: The initial set of need statements, generated in small groups.

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ACTIVITY 3

PURPOSE:	The purpose of this activity is to search for clarity and understanding of the need statements within each group.
PROCEDURES:	While remaining in the original groups, have participants discuss each statement for clarity and understanding. Do not allow questioning of truth or value, and insist that they focus on meaning. Have each group select a moderator to keep the discussion moving, and to generally help the group achieve consensus on the meaning of each need statement. In addition, each group must select a recorder who will make notations of any necessary editing on the original set of need statements. Using a 3-point scale, have each participant rate the clarity of each need statement. Then, ask that they discuss each need statement, focusing on them one at a time, using the clarity ratings.
OUTCOME/PRODUCT:	The outcome or goal is two-fold: (1) to achieve reasonable consensus among group members on the clarity, and (2) to make certain the intended meaning would be clear to people outside the group.

ACTIVITY 4

PURPOSE:	The purpose of this activity is to have people who were not party to the generation of the original need statements confirm the clarity of those statements.
PROCEDURES:	Ask that three members of each group (excluding moderator and recorder) volunteer to move to another group. Then have the "new" members of each group use the procedures from Activity 3 to rate clarity of the need statements. The intent here is not to find fault, but to bring the perspective of persons who have not been party to each group's deliberations. This visit ought to confirm the general success of each group's earlier search for clarity.
OUTCOME/PRODUCT:	A set of need statements that are clear, not only to the group of people who generated them, but also to individuals outside that group.

ACTIVITY 5

PURPOSE: The purpose of this activity is to get the "final" version of the need statements transferred from the butcher paper to 4 x 6 cards.

PROCEDURES: Ask that the visiting members return to their original groups for this activity.

Have each group take a final look at their statements and refine them as necessary in light of the suggestions offered by the visitors. When groups are satisfied with their products, have them write each need statement on a separate 4 x 6 card. The group identification must appear on each card, and the statements must be written in the 3-part format (referent, what is, what is preferred).

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: All need statements prepared by the groups, in final edited form, on 4 x 6 cards.

ACTIVITY 6

PURPOSE: The purpose of this activity is to remove redundancies and collapse similar or related statements into one.

PROCEDURES: The activity is performed by the conference coordinators and occurs during the evening, following the first day's conference activities.

Read each card, and group together those statements that seem to be addressing the same or closely related needs. After all cards have been read and placed in a group, one or more revised need statements must be written for each group. The revised need statements should be reduced to two components—what is and what is preferred. The referents will have served their purpose by this point, and can be dropped.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: Two products will result from this activity:

(1) a typed verbatim list of the need statements, exactly as they were written on the 4 x 6 cards,

(2) the statements, collapsed and revised as necessary to reduce redundancy or ambiguity.

Produce a complete set (photo copy) for each participant and one set on transparencies for use with overhead projector.

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ACTIVITY 7

PURPOSE: The purpose of this activity is to have the participants review the revised/collapsed statements for clarity, and to insure that none of their original ideas were lost.

PROCEDURES: Distribute to the participants the typed verbatim list of need statements and give them a few minutes to read/review the list.

Next, distribute the set of revised need statements. Give a brief overview of the procedures used the night before to remove redundancies, collapse and write the revised statements.

Using the overhead projector and transparencies, review each statement with two concerns in mind:

(1) are the statements as clear as those on the verbatim list?

(2) have any of the ideas presented in the original need statements been distorted, ignored or overemphasized?

Record any editing by the group directly on the transparency, and instruct the participants to record those same editings on their set of need statements.

After all need statements have been reviewed and any editings recorded, ask the following question before proceeding to Activity 8: Taken as a total set, can you accept the need statements that we've just reviewed and given a final edit as a fair representation of the multiple needs that were identified yesterday in the small groups?

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: A set of revised/collapsed need statements that have been confirmed by participants to be a fair representation of their perceived needs.

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ACTIVITY 8

PURPOSE: The purpose of this activity is to allow each participant to rate the importance of each need statement that was reviewed by the group in Activity 7.

PROCEDURES: Conduct this activity in a two-step process, considering each statement one at a time:

First, give participants the opportunity to argue the importance of the statement from their particular perspective (e.g., parent, teacher, student).

Next, allow each individual to draw his/her own conclusions about the importance of the need statement, and to rate that statement accordingly, using a Q-sort technique. Rating should be done in terms of three considerations:

(1) the personal priority placed on that need,

(2) the potential impact on the school district if that need were met, and

(3) the comments or arguments made about that need statement.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: The complete set of conference need statements, rated for importance by all participants—the final product.

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Appendix E

Handouts VI 6 -13

Handout VI-6

"As Others See Us"

Grade Yourself as a Listener

We often speak of "listening skills" as if we either did or didn't have them. The truth is that we listen to different people in different circumstances in different ways. Since we as teachers often grade children on their ability to listen, let's turn the tables and pretend that other people are grading us. Circle the grade that you think the person on the left would give you on your ability to listen.

Rater	Grade	Comments
Best Friend	A B C D F	
President of school board	A B C D F	
Children you teach	A B C D F	
Your own children	A B C D F	
Your spouse or parents	A B C D F	
Parents of the children you teach	A B C D F	
Principal during teacher's meeting	A B C D F	
Superintendent in a one-to-one conversation	A B C D F	

If there are differences, what might be some of the reasons?

Handout VI-7

Telephone Tips for Teachers

For Introductory or "Good News" Calls	For Calls About Problems or Concerns
Mine	Mine
Others'	Others'

School-Family Telephone Record

Teacher's Name: ______________________________

Student's Name: ______________________________

Parent's Name: ______________________________

Telephone Number Called: _______________

You may wish to use this same record for calls from the family to you. Simply record "H" in the Response column.

	Day/Date	Time	Response*	Comments
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

Additional Comments/Record: ______________________________

____

____

____

*A. Spoke With Parent
B. Busy Signal
C. No Answer
D. Disconnected Telephone
E. Scheduled Call Back ____________________
F. No Adult Home
G. Declined to Speak
H. Family Initiated Call
I. Other:

____

____

Handout VI-9

Improving School-Family Relations Through Recorded Messages

"Dial-A-Teacher"

The Message

1. Is for a general audience.
2. Must be short and to the point.
3. Should be available at a regular time and day. Should have the message changed regularly.
4. Should be pertinent to the child's work and should make suggestions for what parents can do.

Ideas for Putting on a Recorded Message

General

Your Age/Grade Level

Handout VI-10

Ideas for Messages and Special Recognitions

Ideas for School-Family Messages About an Individual Child

________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________

Ideas for School-Family Special Recognition For an Individual Child

________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________
________________________	________________________

Handout VI-11

Class Calendars, Newsletters, or Newsbriefs

Ideas for School-Family Communication Through a Class Calendar

Ideas for School-Family Communication Through a Class Newsletter or Newsbrief

Handout VI-12

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY

Dear Colleague:

Earlier this year you received a self-instructional module about and a sample of an "academic guidance sheet." The sheet was to send home to parents to help them analyze why a child might be having trouble in school and then take appropriate action. To find out if the sheets were useful to you and the parents, we are asking you to answer the following questions and return to ________________________________.

How many of the academic guidance sheets did you send to parents? __________________

How many interim progress reports or academic deficiency reports did you send to parents? ___________________

How useful do you think the academic guidance sheets were to parents? (Circle one)

Very useful   Useful   Not at all useful

What suggestions do you have for improving the academic guidance sheets?

____

____

____

____

What comments did parent have, if any, about the interim progress reports and academic guidance sheets?

____

____

____

____

Do you have any indications that parents took any of the suggested actions?

Other comments:

Thank you for your help.

Appendix F

Learning to be a Better Parent

O.M.B. No. 51-S75060

LEARNING TO BE A BETTER PARENT

What to do: First, read what it says below about each thing you might learn more about. Then decide how much you feel you need or want to learn more about that. For example, if you feel you already know all or just about as much as you need or want to know about "How Children Grow and Develop," then mark the box Nothing More At All. However, if you feel you need or want to learn more about that, then you may wish to answer A Little More or A Lot More. Put a check mark (✓) in the box under A Lot More, A Little More or Nothing More At All for each question. We are interested in what you feel. You may, of course, feel that you need or want to learn more about some things, and nothing more about others. No one will judge you as a parent, whatever your answers are. If you do not want to answer a question, then leave it blank.

Name ______________________________

My City & State ______________________

My Children's Ages (in years) ____________

Name of Nearest Grade School ____________

____

	A LOT MORE	A LITTLE MORE	NOTHING MORE AT ALL
I. HOW CHILDREN GROW AND DEVELOP. How much do you feel you need or want to learn more about:			
1. Where you can find out about how children develop.	( )	( )	( )
2. What your child should be able to learn at his age, so as not to "push" your child too much.	( )	( )	( )
3. How children grow into special, one-of-a-kind people.	( )	( )	( )
4. How the world looks and sounds to your child, and how to help him learn about it.	( )	( )	( )
5. How your child's personality is formed.	( )	( )	( )
6. How your child learns to use his body by playing (runs, jumps).	( )	( )	( )
II. TAKING BETTER CARE OF YOUR BABY. How much do you feel you need or want to learn more about:			
1. What happens before the baby comes (what to eat; what drugs not to take; how long to wait before having another baby; things that can happen to the baby).	( )	( )	( )
2. How babies learn to talk (what the baby hears; what it learns from what you do and say).	( )	( )	( )
3. Helping the baby feel good (not too warm or cool; enough to eat; food that might upset the baby; giving the baby room to move around).	( )	( )	( )
III. TREATING YOUR CHILD LIKE A PERSON. How much do you feel you need or want to learn more about how to:			
1. Tell what children are doing by watching them.	( )	( )	( )
2. Help your child see and accept his or her own feelings.	( )	( )	( )
3. Show love and care to your child.	( )	( )	( )
4. Talk with your child about his problems and answer his questions.	( )	( )	( )
5. Help your child to behave when he starts to fight.	( )	( )	( )

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	A LOT MORE	A LITTLE MORE	NOTHING MORE AT ALL
6. Help your child learn to get along with family and friends.	( )	( )	( )
7. Help your child see why rules are good.	( )	( )	( )
IV. TAKING CARE OF YOUR FAMILY. How much do you feel you need or want to learn more about how to:			
1. Pick things for the child's bed and for him to wear (so that they last and are easy to take care of).	( )	( )	( )
2. Find and take care of a home for your family (how to shop and pay for housing and furniture).	( )	( )	( )
3. Pick the right foods and take care of them so they will not spoil (fix meals that are good for your family's health).	( )	( )	( )
V. TEACHING AND TRAINING YOUR CHILD. How much do you feel you need or want to learn more about:			
1. What ways of teaching will work best with your child (the way you teach; use of books, TV).	( )	( )	( )
2. How to control your child by using reward, praise and correction in a loving way (how to help your child control himself).	( )	( )	( )
3. How to teach your child to be neat and clean and to show good manners.	( )	( )	( )
4. How to get your child to go to bed on time (and to rest or take naps).	( )	( )	( )
5. How to get your child to change from doing one thing to doing something else.	( )	( )	( )
6. How to plan your child's use of TV (picking TV programs, not watching too much TV).	( )	( )	( )
7. How to place your chairs, tables and other things so that your child will have room to play and learn (and keeping some things out of sight so your child will not want them).	( )	( )	( )
8. How to feed your child; teach him to feed himself; and make eating fun for your child.	( )	( )	( )
9. How to teach your child to dress and undress.	( )	( )	( )
10. How to help your child think for himself (choose what he wants to do; make plans).	( )	( )	( )
11. How to teach your child to tell right from wrong (to be moral).	( )	( )	( )
VI. KEEPING YOUR FAMILY SAFE AND WELL. How much do you feel you need or want to learn more about:			
1. How to keep your child from getting hurt (and how to give first aid).	( )	( )	( )
2. How to keep your child well (get shots and have the doctor check your child).	( )	( )	( )

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	A LOT MORE	A LITTLE MORE	NOTHING MORE AT ALL
3. How to know if something is wrong with your child (is not learning; cannot walk well; cannot see or hear well).	( )	( )	( )
4. How to know when your child is sick (has a fever or says he hurts some place).	( )	( )	( )
5. How to pick things that are safe to play with.	( )	( )	( )
6. How to tell if your child is growing right (body size, height, weight).	( )	( )	( )
VII. TAKING CARE OF THINGS AT HOME. How much do you feel you need or want to learn more about:			
1. Making good use of your time (plan your time for child care, house work, school or job, time for yourself and your friends).	( )	( )	( )
2. Getting good help with child care (day care, baby sitter, nursery school).	( )	( )	( )
3. How your child deals with the way that your family lives (people in the home, what they do together, how they get along).	( )	( )	( )
4. Finding help for people who don't take care of their children, or who hurt their children.	( )	( )	( )
VIII. YOURSELF AS A PARENT. How much do you feel you need or want to learn more about:			
1. Your own feelings and habits and how these help or hurt your child care (how they affect your child care).	( )	( )	( )
2. Your need to make your child mind you (how your own needs can affect how your child feels about himself, and your child's learning).	( )	( )	( )
3. Why your child will not mind you and how this bothers you (how to get over being upset).	( )	( )	( )
4. How to be sure that you are doing what is best for your child (or your worries about what other people think).	( )	( )	( )

What to do: Just as before, read what it says about each thing from which you can learn. That is, if you think you would enjoy learning about being a better parent from "reading books," then you may wish to answer A Lot or A Little. But if you would not enjoy learning from "reading books," then mark the box Not At All. You may, of course, think that you would like to learn from some things and not from others. Put a check mark (✓) in the box under A Lot, A Little or Not At All for each question.

	A LOT	A LITTLE	NOT AT ALL
IX. HOW TO LEARN ABOUT BEING A BETTER PARENT. How much would you like to learn about being a better parent from:			
1. Reading books.	( )	( )	( )
2. Talking with parents in group meetings.	( )	( )	( )
3. Watching a special TV series.	( )	( )	( )

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	A LOT	A LITTLE	NOT AT ALL
4. Seeing movies near my home (at a school).	( )	( )	( )
5. Having a person visit my home and talk with me each week.	( )	( )	( )
6. Seeing slides and hearing a person tell about them.	( )	( )	( )
7. Reading about this in magazines or in small newspapers (4 to 8 pages long).	( )	( )	( )
8. Hearing a special radio series.	( )	( )	( )
9. Listening to records or tapes.	( )	( )	( )
10. Playing games that teach me to be a better parent.	( )	( )	( )
On TV or radio or in the movies, how much would you like to learn from:			
1. A funny show (humor, comedy, jokes).	( )	( )	( )
2. A talk show with well known guests and parents.	( )	( )	( )
3. Stories about real people (not humor).	( )	( )	( )
4. Special stories done by actors (not humor).	( )	( )	( )
5. An M.D. (doctor) or other expert.	( )	( )	( )
6. A show that goes into real people's homes.	( )	( )	( )

X. OTHER IDEAS. What else do you think you need or want to learn more about in order to be a better parent? Print so that your ideas will be easy to read.

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Appendix C

NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE: Guidelines for Conducting NGT Meetings

Nominal Group Technique

Guidelines for Conducting NGT Meetings

Andre L. Delbecq, Andrew H. Van de Ven, and David H. Gustafson

In order to illustrate the NGT [Nominal Group Technique] process, it will be useful to set up an imaginary meeting situation. We will use the case of twenty participants from various large organizations, attending a training conference on group techniques. Our illustration will be a demonstration NGT meeting, the purpose of which is to allow participants to develop questions concerning how to conduct such meetings in back-home settings.

There is a secondary benefit in selecting this particular case illustration. The illustrated meeting format has been shown to be an effective training device which readers may wish to use as a means to introduce other individuals to NGT.

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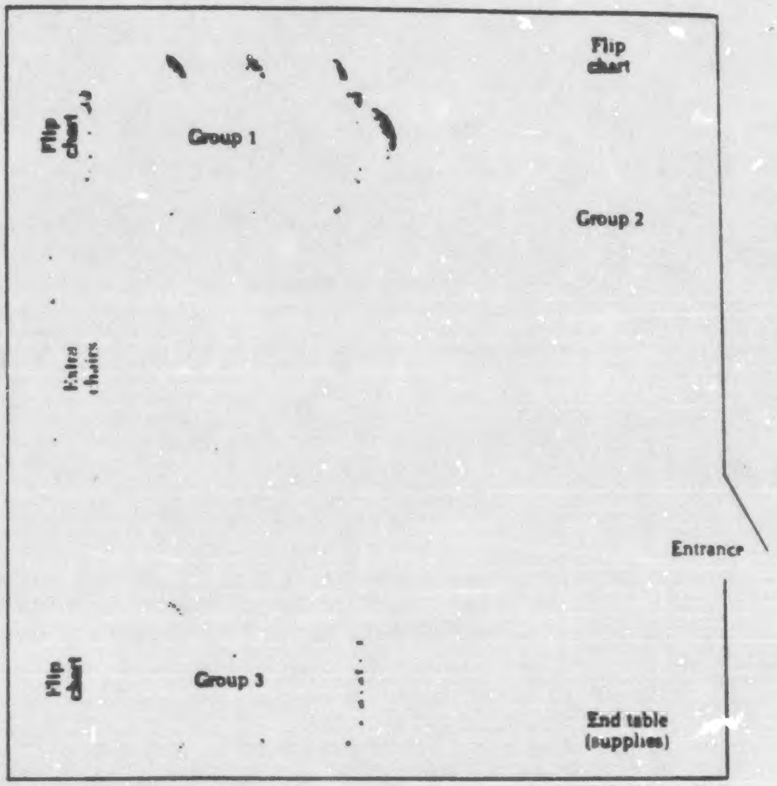

Figure 1 Meeting Room Arrangement for Three NGT Tables

Thus. the leader's welcoming statement should include:

1) A cordial and warm welcome.
2) A sense of importance concerning the group's task.
3) Clarification of the importance of each member's contribution.
4) An indication of the use or purpose of the meeting's output.

We can exemplify such an introduction by going back to our illustration meeting of twenty participants from large organizations gathered to learn about the NGT technique The leader of the meeting might begin as follows:

> "I want to express my appreciation to each of you for attending this workshop on NGT. I am aware that there are many other training opportunities as well as informal activities going on at our convention at the present time. I appreciate the sacrifice you have made to take advantage of this workshop. I welcome each of you warmly to this session.

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The leader passes a set of worksheets to each table. Worksheets are simply lined tablet paper with the nominal question written at the top.

> "You will notice that the question which is the focus of our meeting is the following: What barriers do you anticipate in trying to use the NGT technique back home?
>
> "I would like each of you to take five minutes to list your ideas in response to this question, in a brief phrase or a few words, on the worksheet in front of you. Please work independently of other members in identifying barriers which you anticipate in trying to use NGT back home. During this period of independent thinking I ask that you not talk to other members, interrupt their thinking, or look at their worksheets. Since this is the opportunity for each of us to prepare his or her contributions to the meeting, I would appreciate intense effort during the next five minutes. At the end of five minutes, I will call time and suggest how we can proceed to share our ideas. Are there any questions? Let's proceed then with our individual effort for the next five minutes."

The leader turns to his own worksheet and begins to write.

Step 1 guidelines. There are four key guidelines for serving as leader in Step 1

1) Resist nonprocess clarifications.
2) Have the question in writing.
3) Model good group behavior by writing in silence.
4) Sanction individuals who disrupt the silent independent activity.

It is important to note that . . . the leader should avoid providing answers to the question for the group. Experimental evidence clearly shows that a leader who engages in detailed clarification of group tasks tends to lead the group toward his or her interpretation of the task. In this case, the more the leader "clarifies" the question by providing exemplary answers, the more the group focuses on the leader's frame of reference.

For example, if the leader in our case illustration was asked: "By barriers, do you mean lack of necessary skills?" and answered by saying: "Sure, that might be a barrier. For example, perhaps the person trying to use the technique back home did not have prior experience with the technique," he or she will have led the group to focus on leadership skills as a barrier. In fact, for the particular group of administrators present, other barriers such as status impediments, group compositions, etc., might be far more important.

The appropriate answer the leader should give is: "Any barrier which comes to your mind should be written on your worksheet."

If a member of the group still asks for greater clarification of the question, a useful technique is for the leader to answer: "Think of the question as an inkblot. I want you to look at the words on the worksheet and write those ideas which come to your mind when you read the question." Such a response is obviously dependent on having the question in writing in front of the group members.

As alternatives to worksheets, the leader can write the stimulus question on a flip chart in front of the group. In any case, having the question in writing clearly aids group concentration on the appropriate question and decreases need for clarification.

The NGT leader is normally not an outsider to the meeting, but rather a working participant. As such, he or she should provide a model of appropriate group behavior during the silent generation phase. A leader who is working hard at the task provides an example of good group behavior. A leader who distracts the group by engaging

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There is general agreement among scholars that the sharing of all ideas and equalization of participation increases group creativity. The rather mechanical format of going to each member in turn to elicit ideas establishes an important behavior pattern. By the second or third round of idea giving, each member is an achieved participant in the group. A precedent for further participation has been accomplished without competition with high-status members, more aggressive personalities, or more emotional members.

A major concern in group meetings is problem-centeredness. Earlier we documented the importance of a group identifying all the elements of a problem and avoiding premature problem definition. By listing the entire array of ideas *before* discussion and voting, the group ensures that significant ideas will not get lost or forgotten. Lists also facilitate hitchhiking and allow for the consideration of conflicting ideas without pressure.

The fact that a list is *written* is of particular importance. A written idea is more objective and less personal than a verbal statement. If the idea is in writing, individuals are better able to separate it from the personality or position of the individual contributing it. Also, groups are able to deal with a larger number of ideas in writing. As a rough rule of thumb, individuals remember 40 percent of what they can hear, but 70 percent of what they can both see and hear. The written list also becomes the group's secretary, providing minutes and a working draft for later refinement.

Going from member to member eliciting only one idea at a time has its benefits as well. It is not unusual for as much as a third of an individual's ideas relative to a problem to remain unspoken. Embarrassment, conservatism, fear of self-disclosure, etc., contribute much to the often spoken of "hidden agenda." In pilot studies, individual group members were asked to present their entire list to the group at one time. The effects were to: (1) have members hide a substantial number of ideas; and (2) decrease the depersonalization of ideas since it was easy to identify a cluster of ideas with an individual. Round-robin listing minimizes both negative features. First, individuals are given models for self-disclosure. The example of early risk-takers encourages other group members to present more controversial ideas. Second, as the list progresses in length, it is more and more difficult and less rewarding to try to remember who presented what idea. Instead, the list becomes a depersonalized group product.

Finally, the written list is an important early group reward. Members are impressed with the array of ideas generated by the group, the amount of overlap of ideas providing areas of agreement and consensus, the differentiated contributions of individual group members, and the immediate richness of resources for further analysis. At the same time, the group is protected against premature focus on selected ideas or problem simplification.

Inasmuch as round-robin listing is at the heart of the NGT feedback process, careful attention to this step is warranted.

Step 2 guidelines. Leader requirements for this step include:

1) Clear verbal statement of the step:
   a. the objective is to map the group's thinking.
   b. ideas should be presented in brief words or phrases.
   c. ideas will be taken serially.

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There are situations where individuals seem incapable of presenting their ideas on brief statements. A member might say: "The need for adequate physical facilities limits the effectiveness of the technique to special situations and physical locations." Recorders will soon wear out their felt pens and patience dealing with such lengthy statements. It is appropriate to ask members: "Could you think of a slightly shorter way of placing the idea on the flip chart?" The burden of abbreviation can thus be sent back to the member. A stubborn member who seems determined to speak in epistles rather than phrases can be disciplined by saying: "Would you think about that idea for a few minutes and I will come back to you and ask for a few words or short phrase we can place on the chart." Then the leader can continue, and return to the wordy group member after two or three others have given their ideas. In rare situations (usually research situations with individuals of very limited education) it is appropriate for the recorder to help a member summarize or abbreviate ideas. This, however, should be avoided where possible. The advantages of using the words of the group member are: (1) an increased perception of equality and member importance; (2) greater ego identification with the task; and (3) a lack of feeling that the leader-recorder is manipulating the group.

Members of NGT groups will sometimes engage in one of several disruptive behaviors during the round-robin listing phase. These include: trying to discuss ideas rather than list them; arguing with ideas as they are presented; asking the leader to rule on duplications; and engaging in side conversations. All of these behaviors should be sanctioned when they occur. A member who says: "I'm not quite sure of this idea. Perhaps we should talk about it before we put it on the list," should be encouraged to simply list the idea with an indication that adequate discussion time for all ideas will follow.

The decision as to whether an item is the same as or different from an earlier idea should not be debated. Place responsibility back on the group member by saying: "If you feel your idea is slightly different, let's put it up on the chart."

The goal of Step 2, then, is a rapid, accurate list of ideas in brief words or phrases, recorded in writing on a flip chart in front of the entire group. This list becomes the guide for further discussion and a depersonalized mapping of the group's ideation.

Step 3: Serial Discussion for Clarification

The third step of NGT is to discuss each idea in turn.[2] The benefits of this step are:

1) Avoidance of focusing unduly on any particular idea or subset of ideas.
2) Opportunity for clarification and elimination of misunderstanding.
3) Opportunity to provide the logic behind arguments and disagreements.
4) Recording of differences of opinion without undue argumentation.

Serial discussion means taking each idea listed on the flip chart in order, and allowing a short period of time for the discussion of each idea. The leader points to Item 1, reads it out loud, and asks the group if there are any questions, statements of clarification, or statements of agreement or disagreement which members would like to make about it. The leader allows for discussion, and then moves the group on to Item 2, Item 3, etc.

The dynamics of the resulting communication concerning each idea are important to understand. First, the central object of the discussion is to clarify, not to win arguments. In its simplest form, clarification helps other members understand the meaning of the brief words or phrases on the chart. (It is hardly necessary to belabor the point that written communication is often subject to misunderstanding.) After a brief explana-

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"Finally, let me point out that the author of the item need not feel obliged to clarify or explain an item. Any member of the group can play that role.

[Going to the flip chart, the leader points to Item 1.] "Are there any questions or comments group members would like to make about Item 1?"

Generally, groups will spend a little time on each item without much leader intervention once the serial discussion has progressed for a few minutes. It will be quite natural for the group to be a little wordier and discuss early items longer than later items. For example, if the group generates eighteen items, the first six or seven will be discussed longer than the later items. This will not affect final voting so long as the later items are discussed long enough for adequate clarification. People will also become more time conscious as the discussion progresses and more disciplined in avoiding lengthy, nonfunctional discussion.

Where an argument occurs, a leader can intervene by saying: "I think we understand both points of view at this point. Perhaps, however, we should move on to the next item in the interest of time."

Since personal satisfaction is related to the opportunity to discuss items, the leader should not overpace or drive the group through the item list. Groups generally will pace themselves if the leader clearly indicates the available time for this step of the meeting.

Finally, we should note that individuals should not be asked to clarify their own items. Imagine a situation when a subordinate technician listed an item such as "Inadequate supervisory clarification." Several administrators are present, including his own supervisor. If a group member turns to the author of the item and says: "Joe, what do you mean by that statement?" it could put Joe on the spot. A skillful leader should always intervene and say: "Let's not ask individuals to explain items unless they choose to. Mary, what do the words mean to you?" Although most of the time individuals will volunteer to clarify their own items, the precedent should be established that clarification is a group task, not necessarily the unilateral responsibility of the author of the item.

Step 4: Preliminary Vote on Item Importance

The average NGT meeting will generate over twelve items in each group during its idea-generation phase. Through serial discussion, group members will come to understand the meaning of the item, the logic behind the item, and arguments for and against the importance of individual items. In some manner, however, the group must aggregate the judgments of individual members in order to determine the relative importance of individual items.

Management Science has devoted great effort to determining appropriate mechanisms for aggregating group judgments. It has been shown that the following method increases judgmental accuracy (the ability of a group to arrive at a decision which reflects true group preferences):[3]

1) Having individual members of the group make independent judgments.
2) Expressing these individual judgments mathematically by rank-ordering and/or rating items.

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still further information. The listing in the above figure would seem to indicate that items 3, 7, 9, and 13 were the most important. Yet such a process does not yield any measure of degree of importance. Rank-ordering can provide greater information. Imagine that the members were asked to assign a value of 5 to the most important item, and a value of 1 to the least important item. Now the results of the voting are again tallied

ITEM	VOTES
1	3-2
2	1
3	5-5-4-5-4
7	1-2-1-3-1
9	4-3-2-4-2
10	3-2
11	2
13	1-2-5-5-1

Now it is clear that items 3, 7, 9, and 13, which seemed to be equal in importance when single listing was used, are really very different in importance when ranked.

To summarize, we can increase judgmental accuracy by having group members make individual judgments and express these judgments mathematically. With this brief introduction, we can proceed with a description of a simple voting process often used in NGT meetings.

Step 4 guidelines. The simplest and most often used voting procedure in NGT is a rank-ordering which entails the following leadership steps:

1) Ask the group to select from the entire list of ideas on the flip chart a specific number of "priority" or most important items:
   a. have group members place each priority item on a separate 3 × 5 card.
   b. after members have their set of priority cards, have them rank-order the cards, one at a time.
2) Collect the cards and shuffle them, and record the vote on a flip chart in front of the group.

After a good deal of experimentation, the above steps have been routinized into a simple format. However, they rely heavily on very clear instructions from the leader, so the following guidelines should be read carefully.

The leader begins the voting procedure with a statement as follows:

> "We have now completed our discussion of the entire list of ideas, have clarified the meaning of each idea, and have discussed the areas of agreement and disagreement. At this time, I would like to have the judgment of each group member concerning the most important ideas on the list.
>
> "To accomplish this step I wonder if each of you would take five 3 × 5 index cards.
>
> [The leader hands a set of index cards to participants at the table.]

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[The leader gives the group an opportunity to study their cards.]

"Please write a number 5 in the lower right-hand corner of the card and underline the number three times.

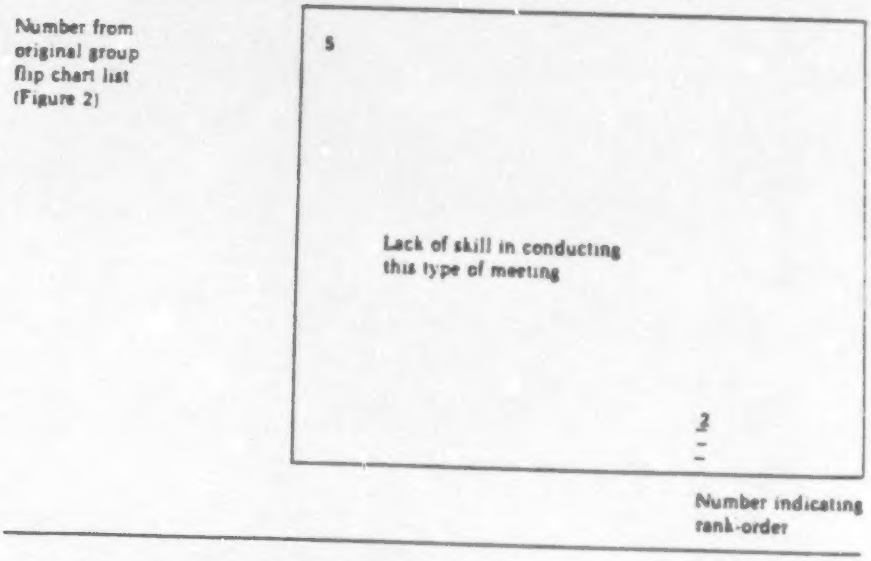
"Turn that card over and look at the remaining four cards. Of the remaining four cards, which is the least important? Write a number 1 in the lower right-hand corner and underline that number three times."

The leader then proceeds to have the group choose the most important of the remaining three cards (number rank 4), the least important of the remaining two cards (number rank 2) and to have the group write number 3 on the last card. Figure 3 illustrates a sample index card. The group is given time to reexamine their rank-order before passing the cards to the leader. When all the cards are in, the leader shuffles them to preserve anonymity, so that no individual member's voting pattern can be identified.

The procedure of ranking one card at a time is to slow the group members into making careful iterative decisions, rather than hasty decisions. The technique of going from most important to least important is optional but helps maintain interest.

The leader then makes a ballot sheet on a flip chart, numbering the left-hand side of the sheet in accordance with the number of items (e.g., eighteen) from the round-robin listing. He or she then asks one group member to read the item number and the rank number from the stack of voting cards. For example, the index card illustrated in Figure 3 would be read 5–2, meaning Item 5 was ranked 2. With one group member reading and the leader recording, the preliminary vote is tallied as in Figure 4.

Figure 3 Index Card Illustrating Rank-Order Voting Process


Number from original group flip chart list (Figure 2)
5
Lack of skill in conducting this type of meeting
2
Number indicating rank-order

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Group
Decision Making

votes, however, to make sure that the differences aren't artificially caused by unequal information, misinformation, or misunderstanding.

It is possible that an item receiving a vote of (5 – 5) might be discussed by the two members who feel the item is the most important, although no other group members selected it as one of their priority items.

Although discussion prior to revoting seldom results in radical changes, when the judgments of the group are concerned with critical or technical matters, the additional clarification can result in a more accurate final vote.

Step 5 guidelines. The role of the leader in Step 5 is to:

1) Define the task of this discussion as clarification, not social pressure.
2) Ensure that the discussion is brief, so as not to distort perceptions of items not discussed.

Studies of voting show that a three-step process – voting, discussion, revoting – provides a more accurate indication of preferences than voting alone. However, the evidence is somewhat contradictory. Without getting into the scientific debate, we would offer the following speculation: groups who do not talk over votes sometimes make errors due to misinformation, misunderstanding, or unequal information. A brief discussion of the first vote assures that this does not occur. On the other hand, lengthy discussion of earlier judgments can distort group judgment by focusing too much attention on the items discussed as against the total array of items. Thus, in some studies discussion decreases accuracy. In striking a balance between costs and benefits of discussion and revoting, the way the leader introduces Step 5 and the amount of time devoted to the step are important. With respect to the latter, the discussion of the vote should be short so as not to distort judgments. With respect to role definitions, the following statements at the beginning and end of the discussion are appropriate:

> [At the beginning . . .] "It may be worthwhile to briefly examine the voting pattern in front of us to see if there are any inconsistencies, surprises, or differences members wish to comment on.
>
> "The purpose of this discussion is not to pressure any member to change his or her vote. On the other hand, if we gain additional clarification, some members may wish to modify their original vote."
>
> [At the end . . .] "Once again, the purpose of this discussion has not been to pressure you to change your original vote. Indeed, you should think carefully before doing so. However, if you honestly have a new perspective as a result of the discussion, you should change your vote."

Step 6: Final Vote

Step 6 is the final NGT step. This vote combines individual judgments into a group decision. The final vote:

1) Determines the outcome of the meeting.
2) Provides a sense of closure and accomplishment.
3) Documents the group judgment.

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Figure 6 A Rating Form for NGT Final Voting

No. from flip chart	Item Description	Relative Importance Not important Very Important
		0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
		0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
		0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
		0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
		0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Instructions

1. Choose the five most important items from the flip chart, and list them in rank-order above
2. Identify the items by using the number and description from the flip chart.
3. Rate each item in terms of its importance on the 0–10 scale, with 0 being unimportant, and 10 being very important

most important. Then, making use of the rating forms in Figures 5 and 6, members rate the relative importance of the selected priority items.

In summary, if one desires an understanding of the magnitude of differences between priorities, a *rating* of priorities is recommended. . . . On the other hand, if the topic is very general, a simple *reranking* of priorities as in Step 4 may be sufficient. . . .

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Hitchhiking as used here refers to the fact that ideas listed on the flip chart by one member may stimulate another member to think of an idea he had not written on his worksheet during the silent period. In this case, he is free to add the new idea to his worksheet and report it for listing on the flip chart when his turn arrives.
2. Interaction has a positive impact on evaluation. The benefit of discussion seems to relate primarily to the opportunity for increased clarification, information giving, and the sharing of analysis and logic behind judgments. This opportunity for clarification accounts for the tendency of group judgment to be superior to isolated

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Appendix E

Members of the Council for Educational Development and Research

MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH

Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
P. O. Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325
304/347-0400

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development
1855 Folsom Street
San Francisco, California 94103
415/565-3000

Center for Social Organization of Schools
Johns Hopkins University
3505 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218
301/338-7575

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory
4709 Belleview Avenue
Kansas City, Missouri 64112
816/756-2401

THE NETWORK, Inc.
290 South Main Street
Andover, Massachusetts 01810
617/470-1080

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
300 S. W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204
503/248-6800

National Center for Research in Vocational Education
Ohio State University
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210
614/486-3655

Center for Educational Policy and Management
College of Education
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403
503/686-5173

Research for Better Schools
444 North Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19123
215/574-9300

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 East Seventh Street
Austin, Texas 78701
512/476-6861

Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance
CERAS Building, School of Education
Stanford University
Stanford, California 94305
415/497-0957

SWRL Educational Research and Development
4665 Lampson Avenue
Los Alamitos, California 90720
213/598-7661

Research and Development Center for Teacher Education
Education Annex 3.203
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas 78712
512/471-1343

Center for the Study of Evaluation
UCLA Graduate School of Education
145 Moore Hall
Los Angeles, California 90024
213/825-4711

Appendix I

A Basic Questionnaire

A Basic Questionnaire

Although evaluative instruments need to be tailored to the particular staff development activities, there are certain fundamental concerns which can be identified. Following the guidelines of Harris (1980) and Baden (1980), a simple questionnaire could be constructed. Containing only six responses, the questionnaire elicits important information about the participant, the activity, the results, and participants' suggestions for improvement. A sample questionnaire is shown below:

Title of Workshop ______________________________

Presenter ______________________ Date ______________

1. Please indicate your teaching experience.
   ___ 1-2 years ___ 3-5 years ___ 6-10 years
   ___ 11-15 years ___ more than 15 years
2. Indicate your group assignment.
   ___ Teacher leader ___ Administrator leader
   ___ Consultant leader ___ Supervisor leader
3. Rate the usefulness of the content in terms of your job responsibilities
   Useful ____|____|____|____|____ Useless
4. Rate the effectiveness of the presenter
   Effective ____|____|____|____|____ Ineffective
5. How motivated are you to adapt the ideas for your classroom?
   Will definitely adapt ____|____|____|____|____ Very skeptical
6. How could this workshop have been more effective?

____

____

____

These six questions can be readily answered. Yet they provide a rich source for evaluating major areas, including the participants' motivations. The questionnaire could be given immediately following the presentation and then, with modifications, could be sent to individual teachers a month or two later. Asking participants to identify themselves is essential if there is to be long-term follow-up. But an explanation of why names are needed is mandatory so that participants will provide honest responses.

From: Staff Development Leadership: A Resource Book. 1983. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio Department of Education.

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Boyd County COET Training

1. One feature of this workshop that I particularly liked was:

2. I learned the following things at the workshop:

3. This workshop could have been improved if:

4. I would like to learn more about:

AEL-REGIONAL EXCHANGE WORKSHOP EVALUATION

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES OFFICE
CHARLESTON, WV 25325

Date: April 17-18, 1984

Workshop: "Effective Schools Are America's Best Bet"

Place: Nashville, Tennessee

I would be willing to discuss further impressions of this workshop with AEL staff or with the Rx evaluator.

Name: ____________________

Business telephone: ____________________

A. Background (check one)

1. Professional affiliation

___ State Department of Education (specify state): ____________________
___ Intermediate Service Agency
___ Local Education Agency
___ College or University
___ Other (specify): ____________________

2. Professional role

___ Instructional Supervisor
___ Curriculum Specialist
___ Dissemination Specialist
___ Evaluation and/or Research Specialist
___ Teacher
___ Administrator (specify): ____________________
___ Other (specify): ____________________

3. Check the number of previous Rx-sponsored workshops attended:

___ none ___ 1-3 ___ 4-6 ___ more than 6

4. Rate each of the following possible reasons that you attended the Rx workshop: 3 = very important; 2 = somewhat important; 1 = not important

___ Topics of high personal interest
___ Information presented will be useful back home
___ Opportunity to interact with professional peers
___ Opportunity to interact with presenters/consultants
___ Topics of direct relevance to my job
___ Other (specify): ____________________
___ Other (specify): ____________________

B. Workshop Objectives

Workshop objectives are attached. Refer to them in answering questions B1 and 2.

1. Rate the degree to which each stated workshop objective was met: 3 = fully; 2 = somewhat; 1 = not met

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	

2. Rate the degree to which each objective is relevant to your work: 3 = extremely; 2 = somewhat; 1 = not relevant

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	

Comments: ____________________

C. Workshop Implementation

Indicate for each statement below the response most appropriate from your perspective: 4 = absolutely, yes; 3 = mostly, yes; 2 = mostly, no; 1 = absolutely, no

1. Consultants and presenters were well prepared. 4 3 2 1
2. Rx staff and presenters were open to my suggestions and input. 4 3 2 1
3. Presentations were clear. 4 3 2 1
4. Presentations were practical. 4 3 2 1

C. Workshop Implementation (Continued)

5. Presentations were relevant. 4 3 2 1

6. Sessions provided adequate time for questions and discussion. 4 3 2 1

7. Written workshop materials were useful. 4 3 2 1

8. Written workshop materials were comprehensive. 4 3 2 1

9. Written workshop materials were relevant. 4 3 2 1

10. The sessions acquainted me with new human and material resources. 4 3 2 1

11. The workshop sessions were scheduled to reflect flexibility and adequate provisions for participants to self-select as needed. 4 3 2 1

12. Pre-workshop materials were helpful. 4 3 2 1

13. Pre-workshop materials accurately portrayed the workshop. 4 3 2 1

14. The workshop atmosphere was conducive to learning. 4 3 2 1

15. The workshop was well managed by Rx staff and consultants. 4 3 2 1

16. The physical facilities for this workshop were adequate. 4 3 2 1

17. The site for this workshop was easy to get to. 4 3 2 1

18. On balance, this was an excellent inservice activity. 4 3 2 1

Comments: ______________________________

D. Workshop Outcomes/Benefits

Circle one of the ratings (4 = absolutely yes; 3 = mostly yes; 2 = mostly no; and 1 = absolutely no) which best reflects your assessment of the outcomes/benefits of the workshop.

1. Workshop provided me with new information and awareness about products and programs pertaining to the topic(s). 4 3 2 1

D. Workshop Outcomes/Benefits (Continued)

2. Workshop helped me to locate and follow-up on programs/practices which meet my needs. 4 3 2 1

3. I gained knowledge about what other states and organizations are doing on the topic. 4 3 2 1

4. I would distribute workshop materials or share what I have learned with colleagues and clients. 4 3 2 1

5. I would conduct a similar workshop for my clients. 4 3 2 1

6. I would use workshop materials to conduct inservice activities for my staff. 4 3 2 1

7. I would use some of the presenters/consultants at the workshop to help me plan my program. 4 3 2 1

8. I would incorporate what I have learned in our own program. 4 3 2 1

9. I would contact ESO for more information or assistance on the topic. 4 3 2 1

10. I would use what I have learned to stimulate joint planning activities with my colleagues. 4 3 2 1

11. I would like to be informed about services ESO can provide on the topic. 4 3 2 1

12. I would attend other workshops sponsored by ESO. 4 3 2 1

Comments: ______________________________

CONFERENCE POSTSCRIPT

1) THIS CONFERENCE HAS BEEN	RATING SCALE LOW				HIGH
WELL-ORGANIZED (EMPHASIS ON HELPING; REALISTIC OPTIONS FOR ADULT LEARNERS)	1	2	3	4	5
COMPREHENSIVE (ADDRESSING MAJOR ISSUES, PROBLEMS, THEMES)	1	2	3	4	5
USEFUL (PROVIDING ACCESS TO PRODUCTS, PROGRAMS, AND PERSONS)	1	2	3	4	5

2) FOR ME, THE MOST VALUABLE FEATURES OF THIS CONFERENCE HAVE BEEN:

3) THE NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF ADDITIONAL PERSONS WHO WOULD BENEFIT FROM RECEIVING INFORMATION ABOUT NEREX PRODUCTS, PROGRAMS, AND SERVICES

4) WHAT OTHER QUESTIONS/CONCERNS DO YOU HAVE THAT MAY BE ADDRESSED BY THE NORTHEAST REGIONAL EXCHANGE IN FUTURE ACTIVITIES?

AEL-School-Family Relations Workshop Evaluation
P. O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325

Teachers and Other Specialists

Workshop: Improving School-Home Communications: Using A Resource Notebook

Date: October 16-17, 1984

I would be willing to discuss further impressions of this workshop with AEL staff.

Name: ______________________________

Business Telephone: ______________________

A. Background (check one)

1. Professional affiliation

___ State Department of Education (specify state): ____________________
___ Intermediate Service Agency
___ Local Education Agency
___ College or University
___ Other (specify): ____________________

2. Professional role

___ Instructional Supervisor
___ Curriculum Specialist
___ Teacher
___ Administrator (specify): ______________
___ Other (specify): ____________________

3. Rate each of the following possible reasons that you attended this workshop: 3 = very important; 2 = somewhat important; 1 = not important

___ Topics of high personal interest
___ Information presented will be useful back home
___ Opportunity to interact with professional peers
___ Opportunity to interact with presenters/consultants
___ Topics of direct relevance to my job
___ Other (specify): ____________________
___ Other (specify): ____________________

B. Workshop Objectives

Workshop objectives are attached. Refer to them in answering questions B1 and 2.

1. Rate the degree to which each stated workshop objective was met: 3 = fully; 2 = somewhat; 1 = not met

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3

2. Rate the degree to which each objective is relevant to your work: 3 = extremely; 2 = somewhat; 1 = not relevant

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3

Comments: ______________________________

C. Workshop Implementation

Indicate for each statement below the response most appropriate from your perspective: 4 = absolutely, yes; 3 = mostly, yes; 2 = mostly, no; 1 = absolutely, no

1. Consultants and presenters were well prepared. 4 3 2 1
2. AEL staff and presenters were open to my suggestions and input. 4 3 2 1

-over-

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C. Workshop Implementation (continued)

3. Presentations were clear. 4 3 2 1
4. Presentations were practical. 4 3 2 1
5. Presentations were relevant. 4 3 2 1
6. Sessions provided adequate time for questions and discussion. 4 3 2 1
7. Written workshop materials were useful. 4 3 2 1
8. Written workshop materials were comprehensive. 4 3 2 1
9. Written workshop materials were relevant. 4 3 2 1
10. The sessions acquainted me with new human and material resources. 4 3 2 1
11. The workshop sessions were scheduled to reflect flexibility. 4 3 2 1
12. Pre-workshop materials accurately portrayed the workshop. 4 3 2 1
13. The workshop atmosphere was conducive to learning. 4 3 2 1
14. The workshop was well managed by AEL staff and consultants. 4 3 2 1
15. The physical facilities for this workshop were adequate. 4 3 2 1
16. The site for this workshop was easy to get to. 4 3 2 1
17. On balance, this was an excellent inservice activity. 4 3 2 1

Comments: ____________________

D. Workshop Outcomes/Benefits

Circle one of the ratings (4 = absolutely yes; 3 = mostly yes; 2 = mostly no; and 1 = absolutely no) which best reflects your assessment of the outcomes/benefits of the workshop.

1. Workshop provided me with new information and awareness about products and programs pertaining to the topic(s). 4 3 2 1

D. Workshop Outcomes/Benefits (continued)

2. Workshop helped me to locate and follow-up on programs/practices which meet my needs. 4 3 2 1
3. I gained knowledge about what other states and organizations are doing on the topic. 4 3 2 1
4. I would distribute workshop materials or share what I have learned with colleagues and clients. 4 3 2 1
5. I would conduct a similar workshop for my clients. 4 3 2 1
6. I would use workshop materials to conduct inservice activities for my staff. 4 3 2 1
7. I would use some of the presenters/consultants at the workshop to help me plan my program. 4 3 2 1
8. I would incorporate what I have learned in our own program. 4 3 2 1
9. I would contact AEL for more information or assistance on the topic. 4 3 2 1
10. I would use what I have learned to stimulate joint planning activities with my colleagues. 4 3 2 1
11. I would like to be informed about services AEL can provide on the topic. 4 3 2 1
12. I would attend other workshops sponsored by AEL. 4 3 2 1

Comments: ____________________

Improving School-Home Communications: Using A Resource Notebook

Objectives for Teachers, Specialists, and Other School Personnel Working Directly with Families

1. Participants will learn current research and recommendations relating to school-family relations and parent involvement, with emphasis on the Appalachian Region.

2. Participants will learn and practice skills in school-family communications.

3. Participants will develop school-family communication materials and plan for implementation in their own schools.

Staff Development Specialists

AEL-School-Family Relations Workshop Evaluation
P. O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325

Workshop: Improving School-Home Communications: Using A Resource Notebook

Date: October 15-17, 1984

I would be willing to discuss further impressions of this workshop with AEL staff.

Name: ____________________

Business Telephone: ____________________

A. Background (check one)

1. Professional affiliation

___ State Department of Education (specify state): ____________
___ Intermediate Service Agency
___ Local Education Agency
___ College or University
___ Other (specify): ____________

2. Professional role

___ Instructional Supervisor
___ Curriculum Specialist
___ Teacher
___ Administrator (specify): ____________
___ Other (specify): ____________

3. Rate each of the following possible reasons that you attended this workshop: 3 = very important; 2 = somewhat important; 1 = not important

___ Topics of high personal interest
___ Information presented will be useful back home
___ Opportunity to interact with professional peers
___ Opportunity to interact with presenters/consultants
___ Topics of direct relevance to my job
___ Other (specify): ____________
___ Other (specify): ____________

B. Workshop Objectives

Workshop objectives are attached. Refer to them in answering questions B1 and 2.

1. Rate the degree to which each stated workshop objective was met: 3 = fully; 2 = somewhat; 1 = not met

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3

2. Rate the degree to which each objective is relevant to your work: 3 = extremely; 2 = somewhat; 1 = not relevant

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3

Comments: ____________________

C. Workshop Implementation

Indicate for each statement below the response most appropriate from your perspective: 4 = absolutely, yes; 3 = mostly, yes; 2 = mostly, no; 1 = absolutely, no

1. Consultants and presenters were well prepared. 4 3 2 1
2. AEL staff and presenters were open to my suggestions and input. 4 3 2 1

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C. Workshop Implementation (continued)

3. Presentations were clear. 4 3 2 1
4. Presentations were practical. 4 3 2 1
5. Presentations were relevant. 4 3 2 1
6. Sessions provided adequate time for questions and discussion. 4 3 2 1
7. Written workshop materials were useful. 4 3 2 1
8. Written workshop materials were comprehensive. 4 3 2 1
9. Written workshop materials were relevant. 4 3 2 1
10. The sessions acquainted me with new human and material resources. 4 3 2 1
11. The workshop sessions were scheduled to reflect flexibility. 4 3 2 1
12. Pre-workshop materials accurately portrayed the workshop. 4 3 2 1
13. The workshop atmosphere was conducive to learning. 4 3 2 1
14. The workshop was well managed by AEL staff and consultants. 4 3 2 1
15. The physical facilities for this workshop were adequate. 4 3 2 1
16. The site for this workshop was easy to get to. 4 3 2 1
17. On balance, this was an excellent inservice activity. 4 3 2 1

Comments:

D. Workshop Outcomes/Benefits

Circle one of the ratings (4 = absolutely yes; 3 = mostly yes; 2 = mostly no; and 1 = absolutely no) which best reflects your assessment of the outcomes/benefits of the workshop.

1. Workshop provided me with new information and awareness about products and programs pertaining to the topic(s). 4 3 2 1

D. Workshop Outcomes/Benefits (continued)

2. Workshop helped me to locate and follow-up on programs/practices which meet my needs. 4 3 2 1
3. I gained knowledge about what other states and organizations are doing on the topic. 4 3 2 1
4. I would distribute workshop materials or share what I have learned with colleagues and clients. 4 3 2 1
5. I would conduct a similar workshop for my clients. 4 3 2 1
6. I would use workshop materials to conduct inservice activities for my staff. 4 3 2 1
7. I would use some of the presenters/consultants at the workshop to help me plan my program. 4 3 2 1
8. I would incorporate what I have learned in our own program. 4 3 2 1
9. I would contact AEL for more information or assistance on the topic. 4 3 2 1
10. I would use what I have learned to stimulate joint planning activities with my colleagues. 4 3 2 1
11. I would like to be informed about services AEL can provide on the topic. 4 3 2 1
12. I would attend other workshops sponsored by AEL. 4 3 2 1

Comments:

Improving School-Home Communications: Using A Resource Notebook

Objectives for Staff Development Specialists

1. Staff Development Specialists will learn current research and recommendations relating to:

   A. school-family relations, with emphasis on the Appalachian Region, and

   B. staff development in today's schools.

2. Staff Development Specialists will learn and practice skills in school-family communication.

3. Staff Development Specialists will plan and implement selected staff development activities using the principles and procedures in the Staff Development Resource Notebook for School-Family Relations.